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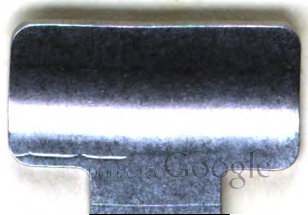

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SEEING SOVIET RUSSIA

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By the Same Author

EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS

THE BODLEY HEAD

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SEEING SOVIET RUSSIA

An informative record of the cheapest trip in Europe

by

HUBERT GRIFFITH

with sketch-map

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD.

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TO

MY FATHER

WHOSE INSATIABLE CURIOSITY ABOUT
ALL THINGS FIRST MADE ME
CURIOUS ABOUT RUSSIA

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PREFACE

THIS short book does not claim to "tell the whole truth about Russia"—a claim that, coming even from a life-long resident, would be pretentious. It records what may be seen on an ordinary tripper's journey, that may be undertaken by anyone with a few pounds to spend on it. Part of the time I was with an official Government-sponsored party; part of the time I was on my own.

I claim, and I hope prove, that in such a way it was possible to see a very great deal. The trip had its minor discomforts; but in the breadth and depth of its experience it compensated for them many times over. If I have induced any group of persons to visit the most interesting country in the world at the moment—to see for themselves rather than to sit at home and read libels about it—the purpose of the book will have been carried out.

H. G.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PREFACE	vii
	SKETCH-MAP SHOWING THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE	xii
I.	WHY RUSSIA?	1
II.	VOYAGE	15
III.	LENINGRAD	37
IV.	TWO BEDROOMS	62
V.	MOSCOW	71
VI.	MADAME PAVLINOVA, THE VOLGA AND THE PROVINCES	106
VII.	MOSCOW AGAIN	142
VIII.	CONCLUSION	178
	INDEX	197

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SEEING SOVIET RUSSIA

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SKETCH-MAP SHOWING THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE

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SEEING SOVIET RUSSIA

CHAPTER I

WHY RUSSIA?

PILATE asked, "What is truth?" and he has not yet been answered.

Any two accounts of the same football match, the same General Election, or the same voyage in the same Soviet ship, will leave a diametrically opposite set of impressions on two witnesses.

As regards this same voyage in this same Soviet ship, of the Line that plies between London Bridge and Leningrad, it has been put in print by one observer that all the crew have "sallow, joyless faces." It has been put in print by another that they spend their entire leisure either singing to a concertina or dancing to a gramophone. The reports are mutually contradictory. One can pay one's money (to the newspaper concerned) and take one's choice.

As in the case of a great deal else in life, one takes away from Russia what one brings to Russia. Prejudices die hard, and one's vision of the truth is limited. I cannot presume to tell the "whole

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truth" about Russia after a tour of Russia's two great cities, three of its lesser cities, long train journeys across its flat surface, and a trip in a boat up the Volga. I can record certain things that I saw, so objective that personal bias cannot come into the record; I can record others where a certain amount of personal bias must be allowed for; and I can "tell the story" of the trip. But into the telling of all stories comes the question of the author's outlook and mood. I shall keep as far as I can to what I actually saw. But the reader had better know in what mood I saw it.

I started out with two qualifications for seeing Russia: a fair knowledge of past Russian history; and a distrust of everything that had been said about Russia in the last fourteen years in the London Press. (I had been a journalist myself for ten years on that Press.)

The perspective of history was likely to be useful. The two most common beliefs held by the English public about Russia are (*a*) that Bolshevism has ruined Russia, and (*b*) that Bolshevism has enslaved Russia. This state of things might or might not be apparent to the eye when one got there. But History would help to remind one what had been the state of prosperity and freedom of the country in the last couple of centuries under the Czars. . . .

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I took my facts about this from no pro-Bolshevist sources. I had read no Bolshevik propaganda, but only impartial non-Bolshevik histories, and the Memoirs of such men as Sazonof and Paléologue, who were themselves upholders of the old régime. But their pages were enough. Paléologue was the last French Ambassador to the Court of St. Petersburg. He was a personal friend of the Czar. He was a man who had spent his life in Courts, and had less natural sympathy than any man on earth with revolutionaries. But from his brilliant and sombre pages it is easy to get a picture of the mental, moral and financial bankruptcy of the whole era. He recurs to a certain reflection more than once in his Diaries: "One has continually to remind oneself that in many ways Russia is not only as backward as the rest of Europe was in the nineteenth century, but as backward as it was in the eighteenth century—or the Middle Ages." He was writing of the years 1914 and 1915.

The facts were there in the Laws of the land, plain for all who cared to read. There were laws that allowed the Czar to keep his Parliament suspended for eight years out of the ten years that it was ever assembled. (Russia had no Parliament whatever until the year 1906.) A

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Government Decree of 1900 prohibited the mention in newspapers of "one thousand eight hundred and ninety-six matters," and provided for the blacking-out of columns of foreign newspapers before they were allowed in the country. An Imperial Ukase of the same year decreed: "No one may leave his village at night under any pretext, or go away from it in the daytime for more than twenty-four hours. . . . Persons found guilty of any unauthorised journey will be punished . . . even if it should be established that the journey was unconnected with any suspicious or illegitimate purpose."

Pogroms occurred from time to time in the years of peace, in which Jewish infants less than a year old were thrown from top-storey windows. The shooting down of two hundred workers in Winter Palace Square on Red Sunday in the year 1905 was described by the British "Annual Register" of that year as "the most terrible massacre of modern times."

I am not romancing about any of this. All of it was to be found in official histories, written before the word Bolshevism had been heard of. One could ask oneself, if the present Government has "ruined" Russia, how far off ruin it was when they took it over; and add that, if they had "enslaved" it, they were at least giving it no new experience.

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I put a slight sketch of this into a play called "Red Sunday" three years ago. It was produced at a semi-private theatre, and was reviewed by the stately "Manchester Guardian" as being written with "Galsworthian impartiality." But before it could be taken to a larger theatre, it had to be passed by the British Censor. The Censor stated: "I know what the play is about. I will save you your two guineas reading-fee by refusing even to read it. I know in advance that I will not license it."

The play contained no new fact that was not well known to anyone who had read fifty pages of any official and impartial history. But it had come up against a certain side of British susceptibility. The truth—or even a part of the truth—must not be told on the stage.

Still less, apparently, may it be told in the Press.

I have said that I had a distrust of most of the publicity given in the Press to Russia; and that this distrust was an asset for anyone going to see Russia. It would be fairer to say that it is essential.

In general, the Press reports of the last fourteen years have been such as to place any fair understanding of the happenings in Russia outside the bounds of public possibility.

Can I put the case clearly? It is this. If I were

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to shut myself up in a London room, and weave a web of fantastic imaginings—how a hundred-and-fifty million people were being flogged to work in the chain-gangs of Communism; how boots cost £10 in Russia; if I invented a murderous uprising in the streets of Moscow, on a day on which not so much as a kitten had been run over in the streets of Moscow—I would merely be ministering to the general impression that the greater part of the Press in England tries to create. I would be believed without difficulty; and I would find my stories repeated, with embellishments, whenever the subject of Russia came up.

If, however, I were to quote facts from the "Encyclopædia Britannica" itself—how Infant Mortality had been reduced by half in Russia in the last ten years; how the Communist Party, being a minority of one in two hundred of the entire nation, could not govern that nation "unless deep-felt needs were being satisfied"—I would be accused of getting my facts from "Bolshevik propaganda," or being in the pay of the Soviet Government itself. . . .

I went to Russia in a more or less open frame of mind, then. As a journalist—but with derision for most of the previous Press reports on the matter. As a playwright, who had brought a play on the

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subject of recent Russian history as far as the shooting of Lenin in 1918; and who was anxious to see how the landscape looked a decade after his chief characters had retired from the battlefield.

It was not an unprejudiced outlook. No outlook can be entirely unprejudiced, until the Day of Judgment dawns in the light of an impartial Heaven. But it was at least inquisitive rather than tendentious. It had a prejudice in favour of seeing clearly what was to be seen.

Friends were not encouraging. I set down a list of warnings that I was given. I was told:

(*a*) That I was taking my life in my hand.

(*b*) That I must take Keating's, and as many tins of Sardines as a suit-case would hold, as emergency rations—and then more Keating's.

(*c*) That I would be allowed to see "only what the authorities wanted me to see," and that from the moment of disembarkation until the time I was escorted off Russian territory, I would be led round by officials like a bear on the end of a chain.

(*d*) That I would come back depressed, as "no Russian had ever smiled since the Revolution."

(*e*) That the English were so unpopular that it was unsafe to walk the streets, and that the English contingent in Moscow went about in groups.

(*f*) My attention was drawn to the advantages

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of a patent medicine called "Dymol." Its property was to make one sick immediately on finding that one had been poisoned. It was recommended that I take this remedy before, during, and after each meal eaten on Russian territory, in order to be on the safe side.

I write these warnings out as they were given me, inventing nothing, exaggerating nothing. They represent what a large body of so-called "informed" opinion seriously thinks is the state of things in Russia at the moment. A decade of Press-propaganda, of invention, distortion and suppression has done its work.

The points will come up again as they were met with, or not met with, during my time in Russia; but even before starting the truth of some of them seemed open to doubt. I discounted the theory that in going to Russia I was taking my life in my hands. I discounted the theory of poisoning and starvation. Since the Russian Government was expressly organising tours to bring trippers into its country, it seemed unlikely that it wanted to get them there either to poison them or to starve them. I discounted the theory that "no Russian had ever smiled since the Revolution." Generalisations like this never carry conviction. I preferred the hypothesis

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of a London General Omnibus conductor, to whom I had mentioned that I was going to Russia, and asked what he thought I was likely to see there. He gave me a broad wink and said, "I reckon you'll find them pretty much like ourselves." I do not know whether large travel-experience had drawn him to this conclusion; but the conclusion came very near my own. After having travelled in nearly every country in Europe, it had become my belief that all European nations are far more like one another than they are unlike.

The question of the "escorting" and of being allowed to see "only what the authorities wanted one to see," was more important. This might be true wholly, or it might be true in part. It would have to be watched. I will only mention here the fact that about five thousand tourists of all nations went to Russia last summer; that effectively to shepherd any visitor in a country must take up the time of two other men; and that if the Government was carrying out this programme, it must be devoting the time of approximately ten thousand other people to the work. (Unless a man is watched *all* the time he might as well not be watched at all. Supposing that one tripper of all the five thousand could speak either French or German, and fell in with

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one Russian of all the hundred-and-fifty million who could also talk either French or German, then—O unhappy Bolsheviki !—the whole edifice of deception would fall to pieces. The ark of their secrecy would be shattered !)

The trip is easy and cheap. Up to fairly recent times, travelling in Russia has been the perquisite of millionaires. More recently, for reasons best known to itself, the Russian Government has thrown the country open to anyone with just over £1 a day to spend on their visit, and no other qualification than curiosity. One does not, as is popularly supposed, need to be "invited." Anyone, of any rank and condition of life, can say that he wants to go, and go.

One goes first to "Intourist," the Soviet Government Travel-Agency in Kingsway. One says what one wants to do or see. There are trips to Leningrad that last a few days only, plus the sea-passage. There are trips that take in Leningrad and Moscow, and either two or three other towns in the north of Russia, or a few of its southern towns and Collective Farms, according to choice. One can go across Asia by the Trans-Siberian Railway if one has a mind to. One can go bear-shooting in the Caucasus. . . .

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The trip that I chose was less adventurous than this. It was to be a twenty-one day trip and to cost £25, with the option of breaking the journey and staying on anywhere that I wished for a further £1 a day—which I did.

For the £25 aforementioned the Russian Government contracts to transport one from London to Leningrad, 1,200 miles, by Soviet boat; to take one by train from Leningrad to Moscow; from Moscow by train to Nijni-Novgorod; thence by Volga river-steamer up to a town called Kineshma; thence by train to yet another town called (unpronounceably) Ivanovo-Vosnessensk; and thence by train back to Leningrad, and by boat again to London. The inclusive charge, according to the prospectus, covered boat and rail-fares, hotels (or "hostels"), conveyance about the towns by motors or motor-coaches or tram-cars, theatre and cinema-tickets, all meals, tips, and the Soviet *visa*.

If the trip were to turn out in all ways as good as its word (and in most ways it did so turn out) it was to be a very cheap trip indeed. The distances travelled were alone enormous—some two-thousand-four-hundred miles by sea, and another couple of thousand by train. One could look over the Soviet boat in the London Docks before

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starting, and she looked more than comfortable. Less could be gathered about the degree of comfort to be expected when Russia was reached. It remained to be seen what was the accommodation offered by "hostels" as opposed to hotels. Travelling in Russian trains was to be "Hard Class." That also remained a matter for speculation. There were to be certain all-night journeys. . . .

But—win or lose in the matter of abstract comfort—the chance of seeing Russia as it is at the moment offered an attraction that was beyond all resisting. I did not want comfort. If I had wanted comfort I could have stayed in London.

The place—Russia—had been getting on my nerves for a long time before I left. The Russian Ballet of the pre-War years had been one of my most poignant artistic experiences. Chekhov, after ten years of first-nighting as a dramatic-critic, had become for me one of the most satisfying geniuses of the modern theatre. I had already been as near the Russian borders as Riga—and had experienced on crossing the Lithuanian frontier at Eydtkuhnen a thrill at being in the country that (once) had been the territory of the Czar. I had been to Constantinople, and had attempted to see the exiled Trotsky in his island retreat on Prinkipo. One night in the early

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summer—long before I knew that there was a chance of my going there—I had dreamed of Russia, and woke shouting, "Take me there. Take me there!" It seemed to be becoming more and more ignominious to have travelled the length and breadth of Europe, and still to have missed the most interesting country of them all.

And why shouldn't one want to see the place?—the creation of this Lenin—the creation of this Lenin, on top of the evolution of the tragic centuries?

Madness seems to hang suspended across all its past pages as one reads back into them. The dark Jacqueries of Pugachev and Razin were pre-Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ivan the Terrible, the Czar who killed his son in a fit of anger, was a madman. Peter the Great, who tortured his own son to death, died out of his mind. Paul I, who was murdered by his own Palace-Guard, was insane from the moment that he came to the throne. The heir to this lunatic line, weak-willed and a prey to religious mania, threw away his last hold on the country as an offering to Fate and to Rasputin.

The Russian Revolution was implicit in the earlier Revolution of 1905, and had been implicit in its form of Government for the last two hundred years.

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And now to see modern Russia—fashioned in the dream of this strange Mongol Mahomet, this new Tartar Christ—perhaps, like his predecessors, another madman. . . .

Surely even to set foot inside it would be worth the passage-money?

The chance to go, the discovery of a cheap means of doing it, the ironic commission from a London newspaper to go and write them some articles about it—I will explain what became of the articles later—all happened unexpectedly, and in a hurry.

I had a week to make preparations, but had work to finish before I started. The boat was advertised to sail at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning. I had to write the night through to complete an article, packed a single suit-case before breakfast, and drove down in a cab to the Docks, arriving at five minutes to ten.

But my hurry and my night-long labour might have been spared me. I have mentioned that my boat was a Russian boat. She turned out to have something in common with the heroines of Chekhov, that I had for so many years admired from a critic's stall. Her advertised time of starting was ten o'clock in the morning—but she left her London Bridge moorings not until after 4 p.m.

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CHAPTER II

VOYAGE—LONDON TO LENINGRAD

Alas, unconscious of their Doom,
The little victims play,

THE Tower Bridge, Limehouse Church, Wren's lovely Greenwich Hospital, and Tilbury Docks fell behind us in turn as we passed down the river. One had time to look over our own boat and its assorted passengers. The boat, the "Dzerjinsky," was a small Diesel-engined liner of about 5,000 tons. For any voyage up to a week or so, she was as comfortable as could be expected. She was like another small liner, that also carried cargo, that I had sailed in in the Mediterranean the year before, belonging to the Messageries Maritimes. The "Dzerjinsky" had the advantage in the matters of smartness and cleanness and looks.

A dozen or so passengers were going in my own group or "Tour." There was a man of about sixty, travelling with his little daughter, a schoolgirl of fifteen with a pigtail. There was an

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American-Jewish business man, middle-aged, who was reported to be engaged on a work of Philosophy. (His excessive ill-temper and querulousness, especially over all meals, later led to his being called by the whole party the Russian endearment of "Doushenka.") There was a middle-aged Englishman who had been a Sergeant-major, and was something to do with a branch of the Labour Party in Wales. There was a young man from Yorkshire who knew about mining, and another young man from Ireland who knew about textile factories. And there was a young Parsee gentleman from India—and what he didn't know about textile factories wasn't worth knowing. And there were a couple of school-mistresses.

There was also M., a friend of mine of days when we had both been at the Slade, and a friend of hers whom she brought with her. Both these girls had been on the eve of a tour in Austria together. I had suggested, drawing a bow at a venture, that Russia was a far more interesting country than Austria at the moment, and that they had better change their plans and come to Russia instead. To my surprise they had accepted the idea, had got their tickets and passports at a couple of days' notice, and had duly appeared at the Docks. From one point of view this was

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delightful. It would be much better fun to travel in the country with people that one knew well, and with whom one could see new things and new places from approximately the same angle. At the same time I was in some trepidation. Comfort, or even common convenience, had not been insisted on in the prospectus of the Tour. I was prepared not to expect it—prepared even to go alone with a few old clothes, and to sleep on the floors of railway-carriages. But both the young women came from country-houses of a certain amount of luxury, and one of them was accustomed to a Rolls-Royce. I could rely on M. to treat the whole thing as a picnic. It remained to be seen if T., whom I knew hardly at all, would have her disposition permanently soured by our hardships.

These two completed our party of a dozen.

The other passengers on the boat were Americans, Russians, then more Americans, and Jews.

I had the luck to be put to share a cabin with a charming middle-aged American engineer called Hamilton. He was going out to Russia under a two-year Government contract to build the largest steel-rolling plant in the world somewhere in the Dnieper valley. All his remarks were to the point, and I shall have pleasure in quoting some of them later.

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There was a large party of American women, escorted by a single American man, a professional "escort." We came across this party from time to time later in Russia, and always their shepherd seemed one degree nearer the graveyard owing to his responsibilities in strapping twelve people's trunks and arranging for twelve people's tickets.

There was a young Russian married couple, very smart, the man more than six-foot tall, the girl dressed in the height of fashion. They remained a mystery. It was noticed that during the hour-long wait in the Customs-shed at Leningrad, they were let through like lightning. Were they Russian Government officials, and in the Secret Service? . . .

There were also—perhaps the most interesting part of the passenger-list—at least a dozen poorer families, lock, stock and barrel, children, furniture and domestic pets, going permanently to live and work in Russia. They had come from America. In most cases the father of the family was Russian by birth, but had emigrated to the United States when a boy. They were Russian-Americans, and American-Jews, and Russian-Jews. The children, an amusing and fairly well-mannered crowd, swarmed everywhere.

I talked to the father of one of the families.

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He had left pre-Revolutionary Russia in 1905 when a boy of fifteen—an engineering student. He had been found one day with a Revolutionary pamphlet on him, that he had picked up in the street. The "offence" had not been grave enough for him to be sent to prison for it, but his career had been closed by all technical schools and Universities being automatically barred to him. He had gone to America. He was the first person that I had met on whom the Autocracy had laid its great hand. It was like meeting a page out of a history-book.

It was interesting to note the attitude of expectation and *hope* of all these families. They were going from a country with many millions of unemployed to a country where there was work for everyone. They all looked to Russia, in one degree or another, as a Promised Land. History was reversing itself: it must have been in exactly this expectancy that their fathers and grandfathers had emigrated to America in the nineteenth-century. No doubt many of them were disillusioned when they arrived at the living-conditions that they found in Russia. But about there being employment they made no mistake. We met one of the men, a mechanic, a couple of days after landing, in the streets of Leningrad.

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He was already fixed for a job. Unskilled labour is not wanted to the same extent. But of the small army that is now streaming back across the Atlantic, all can find work who have technical qualifications of any sort.

Into so strange a world we seemed to be going —and had made up our minds for—that the "Dzerjinsky" was more remarkable to us where she conformed to the standards of an ordinary ship than in the points where she did not.

It came as a mild shock to find that Soviet officers wore blue pilot-cloth and gold braid, as do the officers of all other Mercantile Marines. They messed separately in their own Mess, the Captain alone messing with us in the Dining-room. They stood watches in turn, and directed the working-in and the working-out of the cargo. (It was, of course, strictly impossible to imagine a ship run in any other fashion than this—but it was curious to find that Russia had recognised it.)

The differences were amusing, and in many respects an improvement on the normal. There was a sense—that I cannot describe with exactitude, but that nevertheless existed—that people were doing their jobs for the sake of doing the jobs, and not for fear of immediate compulsion

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from on high. There was a sense of "one-ness" about the ship's population, that was increased by the number of jobs that were made interchangeable, and were interchanged. The ship's Wireless was worked, not by men, but by three girls. (I should be turning aside from the serious purpose of this book if I found time to mention that they were young and good-looking.) But these same girls were also to be observed from time to time helping with the washing-up in the pantry. The midday observation of the sun was conducted by the officer of the watch—but he was assisted each day by a different two or three of the crew, who were receiving instruction in the use of the sextant. Several of the ordinary working members of the crew were students from Universities, taking a few summer months of practical instruction on the boat.

The crew in general were those who had been referred to by a journalist previously on the trip as having "sallow, joyless faces." I may be mad, or my eyesight for the period of the voyage may have suffered the strangest hallucinations—but if asked to give my opinion I should have said that never had I come across a group of people with so much exuberance and energy to spare.

The sports most in vogue on the boat, organised

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by the crew, for the crew and among the crew, were talking, boxing, singing, dancing, and gymnastics. And very rarely indeed was one or other of them not in full blast.

The part of the boat-deck where M., T. and I used to sit and bask in the sun during most of the voyage, looked down on to the after-hatches, by tradition the playground of the passengers' children and the crew. In the morning a gramophone would be started, and decks would be washed down, and rugs and carpets beaten, to the music of the gramophone. After lunch the crew would get out their gramophone again and there would be a recital. "Sheherazade" used to be played over and over again until its records must have been red-hot; "Carmen" seemed second favourite, and then there would be valse-music and rag-time. In the evening there was dancing always, the crew dancing with the three wireless-girls and a couple of the young stewardesses, or any of the passengers who cared to go down. I danced with each of the available female members of the crew at one time or another, and the rhythm of all of them was perfect.

One night I noticed that one of the crew, a man with arms like an oak-tree, who had formerly been a submarine-officer in the Czar's Navy, was

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giving a boxing lesson to the prettiest of the stewardesses. (I imagined for a moment that the worst rumours of Soviet woman-gladiators were being proved true. But the bout turned out to be a very mild one; the ex-submarine-officer, laughing, was merely giving the girl a chance to see whether she could aim straight enough with her fist to hit him on the nose.) Later again, when all the passengers had left the decks, half-a-dozen of the crew would come each night to a pair of gymnastic rings that were hung from the rigging, and would pull themselves up and spin round on the rings like a butter-churn.

The crew's main recreation and living-room was known as the "Lenin Corner." It was largish and clean. A bronze statuette of Lenin, backgrounded by red bunting and Communist slogans, held a position of honour. Photographs of Stalin and Kalinin were on the walls. We were invited there one night for a lecture by the ship's doctor on Typhus. To dissipate the gloom cast by this—or the gloom that might have been cast if we had been able to understand it—it was followed by a concert on deck.

The concert consisted of choral singing, a dance by one of the passenger's children who had learnt clog-dancing in America, some recitations

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(unintelligible), some extraordinarily good Gipsy dancing by one of the wireless-girls, a stockily-built young creature who suddenly came alive, when the music started, into a fury of abandon and energy and quick grace; a knife-throwing exhibition by one of the ship's cooks, more choral singing, more recitations, and a wind-up with a general dance.

The general dancing, in fact, into which the passengers were admitted, was one of the happiest memories of all the voyage. The nights happened to be clear and warm, with the North Sea and the Baltic Sea as flat as lakes, and the sky ablaze with stars.

I asked my cabin-mate, the American engineer Hamilton, what he thought of it all one day. Could a crew, of whom the hardest-worked member seemed to be the ship's gramophone, be said to be carrying out the work of the ship efficiently? I knew that my own judgment was likely to be at fault. I knew nothing about ships, and was naturally disposed to favour a ship where every member of the crew had the air of enjoying himself and being happy. Hamilton, on the contrary, knew all about ships. He had sailed the Seven Seas, and had at one time or another in his life been in every Atlantic, Pacific, and

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P. & O. liner of repute in the world. Moreover, he had been in every corner of the "Dzerjinsky," and through her engine-room.

Hamilton said, "I've never seen a ship that runs with less fuss. And yet everything is up to the mark. The service is good: they look after you without fussing you. I've never seen an unwilling look the whole time I've been in the ship. And they all seem happy."

It is possible, in the light of this, that the Russians have found a formula for running a ship that is at least as good as another. There is a so-called "ship's Soviet," of which every member of the crew is a member. There is a periodic report each trip, to the whole of this Soviet, on the ship's progress—what its cargo is, the number of its passengers, what percentage of the allotted "task" of the ship is being carried out. The chief engineer is asked to report on his engines, and so forth. . . . In actual practice, it is to be imagined that the real control of the ship remains very much where it rests in all other ships—in the central authority. I am prepared to believe that the Captain's word "goes," and that the Chief Engineer does what he likes with his engines, rather than what the fitter's-mate likes. But nevertheless there is left a slight and not

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unimportant distinction. There seems a genuine attempt to impress on every member of the crew that he is part-*owner* of the ship, and that this part-ownership implies in its turn a definite degree of initiative and responsibility. I revert to Hamilton's remark that the ship was well run, and its crew happy.

I learnt a good deal else from Hamilton in the course of the voyage. I never asked him what his salary was to be from the Soviet Government, but I gathered from several facts that he was a distinguished man at his own job, and that it was not going to be a small one. The plant he was to put up was to cost 10,000,000 dollars, was to be larger of its kind than anything in America, and was to take two years in the building. He had left his wife in England (until he should have spied out what manner of land he was to bring her to), and had a son and daughter at College in America. He talked in a quiet, unassuming, intelligent way, and M. and I were as amused at his Americanism as he was at our English.

He had something to say about England. He had seen English engineering and factory-management in England and in India. He said that much of our technique was fine, but that as a

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nation we were often disastrously slow to learn. One or two things in engineering and in factory-management were admittedly done better in America than in England; but let a visiting Englishman have this pointed out—however small the detail, or however diffidently it was put—and the American expert would come up against the blank wall of English Conservatism. (I have heard the same thing said many times, and in many different lands; and Hamilton was saying it with no intention of offence. Having worked with the English for years in India, he had a greater respect for Englishmen in general than have most Americans.)

His anticipations of Soviet Russia were interesting. He was on the point of living and working there for two years, while we were only to be passing trippers. The Soviet boat had impressed him. He was full of enthusiasm for its spirit. "They've had a taste of life, these fellows," he said, "and they're going to do big things." He said again that he believed that much that he had read in American newspapers must be prejudiced and misinformed. "You can't keep 150,000,000 men down. In the long run, there's no power on earth to do it."

He had a clear idea of the difficulties in front

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of him; and as I heard the same argument echoed and re-echoed later in Russia, his anticipation is correct enough to be worth giving. He said, "Years of sheer technical experience, quite apart from good theory, are needed for anything to do with engineering. This is bound to handicap the Russians badly at first, and for a long time to come. You may want to lay out a big new plant. You can buy the complete plans, down to the last detail, of an existing plant in England or America. You can start putting it up somewhere in Russia. But in the very middle of building it, you may find that there's a 'hole' or a small bit of marshy ground that you've not suspected, in the place where one of your main foundations ought to come. *Then* the experience of the man on the spot comes in. Plans won't help him. He's got to improvise, to do new draining, to invent new constructions for carrying the weight. Nothing but years of experience in erecting other plants is going to have given him this knowledge."

"Everything in steel-engineering," he said again, "with blast furnaces, with open-draught ovens and so on, has got to be done *according to Hoyle*"—a phrase that delighted me. It carried me back years to Flying Corps Messes, where

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" according to Hoyle," the supreme authority on Poker, was constantly on the lips of our Canadians. It stood for all correctness and all exactness of tradition.

He also had things to say—the most disquieting part of his discourses—about the Soviet method of engaging foreign experts in New York. He said, " They've often not gone about it in the right manner at all. They could have gone straight to some such place as the Carnegie Institute, and got all the good men they wanted, and with guarantees behind them of their worth. But no; they thought they'd do it their own way, taking advice from no one. We've got just as many incompetents in America as you have in England. . . . We have plenty of people with reputations for being 'a bit of a blower'—that is to say, being able to talk big about themselves and to do nothing else. Well, the Soviet office in New York has engaged some people for all sorts of irrelevant reasons, some because they were able to 'blow' a bit, some because they happened to be red-hot Communists, and some merely because they could talk Russian. There was one man who to my knowledge was no more than an assistant-draughtsman in an engineer's office, and he has been sent out as head of a

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large plant. Of course, they'll sort themselves out in the end. But in the meantime I can see that this is going to be a fine source of a lot of trouble to the Russians."

This was a new light on the matter with a vengeance. I heard later that a number of Hamilton's suppositions had turned out correct. In one case a certain group of foreign "experts" had been assembled in a remote part of Russia a few months before the actual work of construction was ready to begin. Having nothing whatever to do, many of them had applied their engineering expertness chiefly to the pulling of corks. By the time operations were ready to start, a percentage of them had drunk themselves permanently incapable.

The voyage began to draw to an end.

The North Sea had been flat and cloudless and warm. Being one of the great water-ways of the world, it had been alive with shipping. By day or by night there had never been less than a dozen other ships dotting the horizon. In the mouth of the Elbe we passed the "Bremen," outward-bound for America. Her size was amazing. Afterwards, when she was miles away on the horizon, she still seemed standing up into the

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sky like a cathedral. One thought of Shakespeare's line:

. . . And o'er green Neptune's back with ships made cities.

We had passed through the Kiel Canal on the morning of the third day. From the high boat-deck of our ship we could see far across the flat, rich pasture-land of Schleswig-Holstein. It was our last glimpse of land that was not Soviet-land.

The Baltic was also flat and cloudless and warm—a sea fit to spread its carpet for an Embarkation for a new Cythera. But for all its beauty it was more lonely than the North Sea. Except for ourselves, and an occasional tramp-steamer on the horizon making for Helsingfors, it was empty of shipping. We were entering "Northern latitudes."

We turned Eastward into the Gulf of Finland. On the last evening before arrival, Hamilton and I consulted the rest of the passengers and the secretary of the ship's Soviet, an oily-handed mechanic, what to do about tipping. We would have liked to tip, as tipping seems inseparable from the tradition of a boat, and our hosts had been at pains to give us a good time. But that was the trouble. To any passenger who had shown the least disposition to be friendly, their

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attitude had been more that of hosts than of paid servants. One cannot tip one's host.

We were told that tipping was definitely forbidden by the rules of the ship, but that if we cared we could make a small contribution to the comforts of the Lenin Corner. Hamilton and I collected from the passengers, and took the money to the secretary, asking him to thank the rest of the crew. I was told later, on a rumour whose truth I do not know, that even this is only a polite fiction :—that the money so collected has to be handed straight over to the Government authorities, and that the crew does not see it again. If it is true, it is further evidence that the personnel of the boat was polite for the sake of politeness, and not because they looked forward even to an indirect monetary reward.

The last morning, steaming towards the mouth of the Neva, was grey and overcast, a change from anything we had yet had on the voyage.

It gave one a chance to readjust one's outlook.

I was aware that the voyage had only been a prelude, and that the main work was not likely to be orchestrated on so lyrical a theme.

The boat had been newly-built, and was as clean as a new pin. Russia itself had not been newly-built, and was not likely to be as clean as a new pin.

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The crew on the boat had been in exceptionally favoured circumstances. Their quarters were good. Their food was good. Their work was pleasant. They had some reason to move to the perpetual music of gramophone and song. In Russia neither the quarters nor the work nor the food of ninety-nine hundredths of the populace were likely to be so good or so pleasant.

We ourselves had been travelling First-Class on the boat. The linen on the bunks had been spotless, and the food had been admirable—and too much of it. Once we had landed, "Hard Class," whatever that might be, awaited us, and "hostels," that might be mere doss-houses for the night.

I was prepared, as I have said, for discomfort. It was to last in any case only a month. For myself it could be put up with as a temporary purgatory, to be terminated at any moment by a flight back to Town.

But to go among a nation of a hundred and fifty million, backward and over-crowded and struggling for their lives . . . whose rulers themselves claimed only that the battle against Poverty was beginning, and not that any decisive successes had been won. . . . It was an adventure, certainly, an experience—but an adventure where the seamy side might be uppermost.

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Farewell, then, to the "civilisation" within the walls of the ship! Farewell to the basking in the sunlight, ladies and gentlemen of leisure! Farewell to the people who had been charming and friendly to us, and to "Sheherazade" on the gramophone, and the dancing on deck under the stars! Life in future was to be real and to be earnest—and possibly depressing.

And so the first close view of it was.

The low grey city of Leningrad—Petrograd—St. Petersburg, came towards us as we steamed slowly, in the early afternoon, past Kronstadt up the narrowing neck of the river. St. Petersburg was built originally on the marshes that used to lie at the Neva's mouth. We passed miles of ship-building yards on either bank. At the end of them, in the grey afternoon mist, rose the golden dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral. Just beyond it was the tall gold spire of the Admiralty, as thin as a needle, familiar from years ago in the celebrated backcloth to "Petrouchka." Over against it on the opposite bank was another answering gold spire—the spire of the political Prison-fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul.

We docked at four o'clock in the afternoon. Customs business and money-changing kept us an hour. (It was drizzling slightly, and during the

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wait, the father of one of the immigrant families attempted a stroll on the quay outside the Customs-shed, taking one of his children in his arms. A Soviet official popped out immediately after him, noticed that the infant was bare-headed, and told the father that he must either come inside the shed again, or put something over the baby's head. "Why, Public Health is better in Russia than in England . . .")

A motor-coach came in due course to collect the Intourist party. Farewell, alas, to Hamilton, who had official appointments, and would be staying in Leningrad on his own. He had been the best company of anyone on the boat, and we left him with regret.

The motor-coach bumped with us and our luggage over the worst piece of cobbled roadway that I have ever known, took us across a bridge, along the windswept quays in front of the Admiralty, and turned down the Nevsky Prospect towards the heart of the city.

It was between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, the rush-hour of the day. Leningrad is built of stucco over brickwork; and its stucco is cracked and peeling, and lets the brickwork show through. Its long and wide straight streets are badly cobbled and ill-swept—very badly

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cobbled, and very ill-swept. The gaunt spaciousness combined with the unkemptness makes the whole city suggest an untidy barrack-square. The streets were swarming with a dense crowd of ill-dressed humanity, hurrying along the pavements, or crushing into the already over-crowded street-trams. The spectacle of the trams was beyond belief. The density of the humanity inside them was not that of sardines in a sardine-tin, but the solid ramming-together of prunes in a prune-mould. The faint light of the street-lamps was beginning to struggle against the grey light of the late afternoon. The drizzle sluicing down from the grey heavens did nothing to add to the gaiety of the scene.

The warm luxuriousness, the white table-cloths, the cheerful "Lenin Corner" of the "Dzerjinsky" seemed suddenly a thousand miles behind us in distance, and ten centuries in time. The first view of modern Leningrad was that of a teeming and disorganised human ant-heap—and an ant-heap, if I may mix the metaphor, where such things as wallpaper, paintwork and plaster had had no attention for the last twenty years.

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CHAPTER III

LENINGRAD

IN Leningrad, the city of low skies and much autumnal rain, the business of sight-seeing and inspection began.

We tried to put it off for as long as we could—for the first evening, at least. During the first meal in the Znaiminskia Hotel, on the evening of landing, I tried to get through to Hamilton on the telephone at the Hotel d'Europe. But he had been unable to get in at the Europe, and had sought refuge by chance at our own hotel. We had a re-union as with an intimate and much-valued friend-of-childhood—lost strangers in the whirl of the new city. I and M. and T. and Hamilton went forth later still into the jostling crowd on the Nevsky Prospect. We made for the river a mile away, past the Admiralty, past the Winter Palace Square—where the massacre of 200 citizens had taken place on the celebrated Red Sunday of thirty years earlier—past the great Winter Palace itself, and out on to one of the Neva bridges, above the dark ruffled water.

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Here at last we were in what had once been the heart of the former Imperial Russia—now deserted, and no longer the centre of any life. I suppose we each speculated upon it in our own way. Hamilton—as his first glimpse of a land that was to be his home for two years; M.—as a passing pageant; T., who had reactionary tendencies, keeping up a running prattle about "how wonderful it must have been in the days of the Czar." Granted that one could forget the filth and blood and misery of peasantry, the occurrence of periodic Red Sundays, the gloomy bastions of the Peter and Paul Fortress facing us across the river, and the fact that a single decade of the Autocracy had sent 50,000 political prisoners to Siberia,* it must have been wonderful in the days of the Czar.

There were no lights in any of the great buildings. The windy quays were deserted except for an occasional couple walking hand in hand along them—holding its hats on against the wind with its disengaged hands. A drunken man lurched lonely across the dark emptiness in front of the Winter Palace. We got back to the hotel, having avoided taking a droshky as it was liable to cost £1 or more, very tired.

* "Encyclopædia Britannica."

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In the morning, the business of "touring" began. The method of the Intourist authorities, wearing as it was on the nerves and on shoe-leather, was brilliantly efficient. It showed us as much as was possible, and ten times more than I would have thought possible, in the time.

We used, very occasionally, to have a motor-car to take us round. More often it was a motor-coach. Most often of all it was by way of an ordinary street-tram, that we were crushed into along with the rest of the populace. Which was in itself a way of getting to know something about city life, though a drastic one.

We usually started, the twelve of us together, between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, after a breakfast of tea (without milk) or coffee (with milk), black bread, white bread, butter, and cheese. Russia shares with the Netherlands the habit of eating cheese just at those times when no one else would think of eating it. Occasionally a couple of boiled eggs would be thrown in. But this happened spasmodically, and we came to look upon the eggs as a gift of Providence when they arrived, and not to claim them as a right or privilege when they did not.

As the first attraction of the day, we would usually be taken by tram miles out into a suburb—

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occasionally right out into the country itself—to look over a factory; with which was usually included its "factory kitchen," some workmen's dwellings, and a school or two in the vicinity—in all, a good three hours' work.

We would then, contrary to our anticipations, *not* be taken back to lunch. No! We would be taken back through the city, and possibly a few miles out in another direction, to see a crèche, a clinic, and a museum. We would arrive back at our hotel for dinner, the main meal of the day, not much before four o'clock in the afternoon. Afterwards, at six or seven o'clock in the evening, we might be taken out on another shorter jaunt again or for a mere "sight-seeing ride" in a private motor-bus, or to a cinema.

The method had an obvious disadvantage—a long and perhaps exhausting morning, on a physique nourished by not much more than bread-and-butter, bread-and-cheese, and coffee.

But it had, as against this, an advantage that was inestimable. It was a stroke of genius to run the first two expeditions together without coming back for a meal in the middle. If the guides had got us in to the hotel, sitting round a table, in the middle of the day, the chances were that they would have never got us out again, or at least not got us

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out without wasting a great deal of time. As it was, before the early-afternoon meal came round, we had always a very considerable tract of country covered behind us—and could take it easy or not, as we liked, for the rest of the day.

Again, the practice of taking us to distant places was admirable. Like all trippers, we could be relied on to get to know the streets round our hotel and the centre of the town in the course of our own wandering, and in private expeditions to shops. But to be pushed out daily on long tram-rides and bus-rides that went on for miles, was to say that at the end of a few days we knew many different aspects of the city, not only its centre, but its inner and outer suburbs, and the country outside. This was an advantage that nothing but an energetically-organised trip could have given us. The instinctive laziness of an unattached visitor prevents him doing it for himself. He confines himself to the few centre-streets that he can get to know by heart; and, in a country where he does not speak the language, feels himself adventurous if once in the course of his stay he gets on a tram and takes it to its terminus and back again.

No one in the party was enthusiastic over the amount of hurry, scrambling on and off street-cars, and walking that it entailed—the early-morning

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starts and the long hours without food. But thanks to the method, at the end of a week each in Moscow and Leningrad, I had seen five or six times as much of these cities, in all corners from north to south, from east to west of their boundaries, as I could have expected to see, however long my stay, on my own.

If I have suggested that we were under any compulsion to go out daily with the guides, I have suggested something quite untrue. We could please ourselves. The plan for the majority was "there," if we chose to fit in with it. If not, we could wander on our own. Occasionally, fatigued by the incessant rush, we would decide to wander on our own, or merely to sit about and talk. But we later began to be chary of doing this, for the simple reason that when we missed going with the party, thinking that we had a better plan, we invariably missed seeing something of first-class interest. In Leningrad we missed St. Isaac's Cathedral, a miracle of baroque art, which in addition now houses an "Anti-Religious Museum." Hamilton, who is not easily impressed, went there independently, and came back much impressed. He said that the ingenuity with which the whole history of orthodox Religion had been set out, making it appear a long panorama of burnings and torturings and invasions, was simply diabolical. . . . In Moscow,

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for the same reason of slackness, we missed going to Lenin's Tomb. As we particularly wanted to see this, we had to dash there on our own in the last hour before leaving Moscow. On the whole, the guides knew their business.

About "concealment." This was so important a point, and I had been warned so categorically to expect it—the "bear-leading" supposition, and so forth—that I kept a weather-eye open for it.

Broadly speaking, it did not exist in any form, shape or manner.

The trouble, as far as trouble existed, was that we were shown too much, rather than too little. The enthusiasm of the guides was insatiable. If we were taken over one factory, we were taken over a dozen. I became so sick of factories, textile factories, machine factories, cigarette factories, after three weeks of them, that it is my earnest hope in life never to see another. All of them were vaguely interesting to an inquisitive eye, as showing how a Russian populace lived, worked, grinned, and were polite to passing strangers. But when, after a good deal of this, the guide's morning voice would be raised in the query, "Now to-day, if you like, we go to see a factory, yes?"—one voted for an alternative entertainment.

It was the same—though they were always

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more interesting—with the working-class flats that we were taken into. One day it was suggested that the particular flat that we were being taken over, clean and neat and tidy as it was, had been specially warned of our coming, or was kept, uninhabited, as a show place. Instantly we were taken into and over every other flat on the same staircase. It was the same with the crèches. In the first fortnight I must have seen many hundreds of babies, eating, sleeping, playing or having lessons, in the large day-nurseries where their mothers send them while they are away at work.

If it is urged that, even so, we were taken to places organised to impress us, I can only say that this implies a larger scale of organisation than I can believe a nation to possess. It implies that a dozen or so each of factories, crèches and blocks of workmen's dwellings, a score more of prisons, workers' rest-houses, and Courts of Justice—an entire section of the nation's activity—is set aside and run for the purpose of impressing a handful of trippers. On the surface of it, this is not likely, either from the point of view of the time needed, or the money. In practice, it was seen to be flatly impossible. We were a straggling and disputatious party. I have mentioned that we were usually taken to places, over

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long distances, by tram. Sometimes we would arrive on time. Sometimes we would arrive anything up to a couple of hours late. Sometimes we would not arrive at all, having changed our minds, and persuaded our guide to take us somewhere else altogether. Again, we were free to wander and to inquire. We were taken once in a party to a "People's Court of Justice" in Moscow. If it were being "staged" for our benefit, at least we were free to wander into a couple of neighbouring Courts, where precisely the same thing was happening. A few days later, being interested, I went back alone and saw four more such Courts.

Furthermore—and this at least in my own eyes is a strong argument—I object to being thought a complete idiot, without power to reason or to observe. I contend that it is impossible to spend hours of each day elbow to elbow with a populace in its trams, to wait at its factory gates, to pass among its workers at their benches and their lathes, to go into its houses—where a powder-puff pushed away in a corner, or a pair of stockings airing at a stove will show fast enough whether the house is "inhabited" or not—without having a pretty clear idea whether things are following their normal course, or are being specially staged for the occasion. The

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un-hurried, workaday every-dayness of it all, the common-placeness, the lack of effect, were evidence enough. Even a blind man can sense the difference between a battalion on General Inspection, and the same battalion back in billets at its ease.

I take leave instead to venture another theory, that was borne out by everything that I saw in Leningrad, Moscow, and the Provinces, and that re-occurred to me every day that I was in the country.

It is this. Some time ago the London Editor of the "Manchester Guardian" told me that he had been across to New York, and through the Middle-Western States of America. He said that New York had not been unduly impressed at his presence—that New York was well accustomed to visitors and was cheerfully indifferent to them; but that the Middle-Western States, on the contrary, were overwhelmingly cordial to him, and seemed genuinely flattered and pleased that an Englishman had penetrated so far to have a look at them.

Even so seemed to me to be the case with Russia. A comparatively small number of visitors has so far penetrated to Russia. Most of us have been content to sit at home, and read newspaper fiction about its atrocities. The attitude of score after score of Russians that I later talked to in

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trams, railway-carriages, and at their work, was that they considered that Russia had now at last got something to show worth seeing—and were genuinely pleased and flattered that foreigners had thought it worth coming some distance to see.

That some of this, even among things that they most prided themselves on, was still backward in development, has nothing to do with the case. The eagerness to show one what was happening, in the same spirit that a child will delightedly show a visitor a new toy, remained, up to the very end, my strongest impression of the whole journey.

It is difficult to stop generalising, as I have been doing up to now. I will henceforward relate, as accurately as possible, exactly what I did see. But the conditions of seeing it were an important part of it, and it is for that reason that I have disgressed so far.

The fact that I speak German and French—German nearly as easily as English, and French at least reasonably fluently—began to come in useful from now onwards. One could always talk to and cross-examine any Russians that one met through the interpretership of our guides. There were discussions arranged in most of the factories, clubs, etc., that we went to, for this purpose. We could ask questions, and would have questions in turn fired at us. But the medium

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of an interpreter meant that conversation was always second-hand, and often unsatisfactory. To find that a very fair proportion of the Russians that one met could speak German, put the matter on a different footing. Many of the engineers had learnt their trade in Germany. A good many of the mechanics had come from Riga and the border-States, where German, up to recently, had been the normal language. I do not wish to pretend that German and French are universally spoken or understood. They are not. But by "trying round" one could nearly always find, in any group of people, a man who could understand either one or the other. Towards the end of my stay in Russia, when I was travelling alone and away from the rest of the party, I found that I hardly ever stopped talking.

One begins one's view of a city from one's hotel outward. (The threatened "hostels" never materialised.)

Our first Leningrad hotel was a gaunt and rather abandoned-looking building, reserved almost entirely for foreign tourists, facing on to the great October Square in the middle of the city. In the Square converge and intersect all the tram-routes of the city. The bronze figure

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of Alexander III, the last Czar but one, surveys the proceedings from a massive bronze horse that has been described as "less like a horse than a hippopotamus." The hotel was worth staying at for its position alone. The Square is of vast size. The bedrooms look straight down on to it. I shall remember, as long as memory lasts, the vision, in steep perspective, of the hurrying and waiting thousands—hurrying about their business, or waiting at the tram-halts—like dark ants seen from the high bedroom windows. The Square was always full. At any hour of the day or night it has more people in it than Piccadilly Circus. The tram-queues, towards the rush-hour of the afternoon, are like the tram-queues for a Cup Final. A window overlooking it was a window on to the life of the entire city.

Apart from this, the hotel had not much else to recommend it. It had been in former days one of the smart hotels. You can picture it if you can picture a Midland Railway Hotel in the English Provinces of the year 1850 or so, deserted of all life for ten or twenty years after that, then hastily taken again into use, with enough dust knocked off its observable surface to make it reasonably fit for habitation.

Its lift did not work, and its stone stairs

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were uncarpeted. Its corridors were gaunt and echoing. Stuffed bears—yes, stuffed bears six-foot high, with tea-trays in their supplicating hands, decorated its bleak landings. The roof of its main dining-room was built on the principle of a single-span glazed vault, in accurate imitation of St. Pancras Railway Station. Its tables (which had clean table-cloths) were enlivened with palms and aspidistras, in pots garlanded with raffia-work.

I do not wish to wrong it. It was perfectly serviceable as an hotel. Its beds were clean, and it had running water, parquet floors, and grand pianos in its bedrooms.

From a young man who shared my room in Leningrad I learnt my first valuable lesson in the technique of travelling in Russia. He was a Cambridge undergraduate who was waiting for a boat home, after having been in Russia a month. Early on my first morning, I noticed him jump out of bed, strip, and go through the complicated gymnastic manœuvre of taking a complete cold bath from the room's hand-basin. He said it was the easiest way of getting baths in Russia, and I acquired the technique. It was possible occasionally to get other baths, even hot ones. Sometimes they would be attached to our rooms, sometimes they could be had by previous negotiation

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and by paying two or three shillings for them. But once the agility was acquired of taking a bath from a cold-water tap fixed four feet high in a wall, one could be independent of bath-rooms; and I used this method for the rest of the time that I was in the land.

What we saw . . . ?

I have a recollection of a factory, and a "factory kitchen," and then another factory, and a school.

The factory kitchen was interesting. Most groups of factories have such an institution—a large new building entirely devoted to preparing the meals. Some of them can provide meals for 10,000 people a day. We were taken all through it—its central dining-hall (which was not large, as most of the meals are sent out to the factories concerned), and its separate vast rooms devoted to washing plates (by machinery), chopping vegetables (by machinery), cutting up meat, and so forth. On the whole it was cleanly and efficiently run. The resulting meals, if not up to the standard of a London hotel, looked appetising and eatable. A worker can get a complete midday meal of soup, meat, vegetables and some sort of pudding for a few pence. The assistants, who were women in all departments except the meat department, wore white—and it was white.

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I have a recollection of a long wait at a factory gate. Our party, not for the first time, had got separated in two trams, and those who arrived first at the rendezvous had plenty of time for philosophic speculation. If one were a stickler for times and schedules, these delays would have been maddening; as one was only out to see and to be amused, they were as instructive as anything else. The factory was at the end of a long, muddy street in a suburb. It was the men's lunch-hour, and there were lounging groups. A bearded elderly man in the middle of the roadway was delivering an oration. From time to time, for emphasis, he would lean forward slowly, uncover his head, and throw his cap into a puddle, subsequently retrieving it and repeating the manœuvre. It became apparent that he was drunk. A Russian workman who had a few words of English told me that the orator was not talking politics but was telling his life-history—claiming, among other things, to have fought gallantly in the Red Army from the time he was twenty-eight years old. (As the old gentleman was at least sixty at the time, his story was not convincing. The Red Army could not have come into existence until he was forty-five.) My informant told me that he was well-known as a man who had

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several times been kicked out of the factory for drunkenness, and could no longer get a job there.

This question of drink is still an important one in Russian national life—as it has been for centuries. Vodka, which is cheap, is not only a stimulant, but an engine that knocks one down as though with a bludgeon. One sees men stretched flat full-length on the pavements of Moscow and Leningrad. But if a great many men still drink too much in Russia, a great many more now hardly drink at all. There is continual propaganda against drinking. I have heard it described by workmen, with great seriousness, as the "evil genius of our land." There are endless posters on the hoardings against it—diagrams of enlarged livers and distended kidneys, posters of grotesquely hideous drunkards pouring bottles of vodka over miniature factories and setting them ablaze. Against the corpse-like figures that one occasionally sees lying in gutters and under archways, must be set the fact that whole districts such as the Parks of Rest and Culture, with their circuses, sport's-grounds and clubs, are run without the assistance of alcohol of any kind, and that in no theatre, or cinema, is it possible to get an alcoholic drink.

I also talked to a young German workman during the wait for the rest of the party. He

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seemed to be having a good enough time. He was a mechanic, and got a salary rather above the normal—200 roubles a month (say, something less than £16 English, though this translation of value, as I shall explain later, does not exactly express it). He said that he did not spend all he earned, and was saving. He got his meals cheap at the factory; room-space was short, so that he could not spend more than a certain amount on his lodging; and a good many other things such as theatre-tickets he got cheap through his factory-organisation. He had been in Russia a year, found himself well situated, and proposed to stay and work a couple of years longer. (I take his account of himself as being worth believing, as he was neither a Russian nor a Communist, and had nothing to gain by telling me lies. Besides—again the personal factor—if one is half-an-hour in conversation with a man, one usually gains at least a reasonably accurate working-estimate of his mind.)

The number of women working in the factories is amazing. A peculiar new type of man-woman seemed to be evolving. Dressed in workshop overalls or boiler-suits, as most of them were, and wearing short hair, it was often difficult to say in the distance whether an intent face bending over a lathe belonged to a man or a woman.

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It was also interesting to note—bearing in mind the fell rumour that "no Russian had smiled since the Revolution"—that in all our wanderings and trapesings about factories, once one had mastered a lame Russian equivalent of "Good morning" or some greeting, there was no Russian operative who would not give one a friendly smile or a grin or a wink. I do not say that this was remarkable. They behaved as a body of operatives in, say, a Sheffield factory would probably have behaved to a party of visiting tourists—with cheerful and friendly indifference. But at least it did away with the theory of their being "slaves driven to work with the knout," etc., etc., etc.; in my general experience they seemed to find at least as much to grin about as most English workers.

Hamilton's opinion on his first Leningrad factory is worth giving, because once again Hamilton, unlike myself, knew what he was talking about. He had, when we next met, been over a large hydro-electric concern in the neighbourhood of Leningrad. His opinion was that it was not a "clean" factory as Americans reckon factories—that is to say, that all tools and minor parts were not accurately enough kept check on, nor replaced immediately in their place when not

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wanted. Apart from this, he said that the standard of work was "pretty good," and seemed on the way to getting better; that the managers and foremen who had gone round with him were keen to hear his impression of their efforts, and particularly keen to hear his *adverse* criticisms, with the idea of future improvement.

He also said another thing. He said that he had noticed that they were now beginning to construct the biggest kind of machinery in their own factories: the Diesel engines of the "Dzerjinsky" had been Russian-built; he had seen castings of the very largest size in his hydro-electric works. The nations who had formerly had the opportunity of supplying Russia with large-scale plant and machinery, were now losing their chance. The Russians were rapidly beginning to design and manufacture their heavier, as well as their lighter machinery for themselves.

A "Workers' Rest-House." We dashed out there one evening about six o'clock in a motor-chatabanc. It was situated on what are called "The Islands" to the north of St. Petersburg. It was formerly a country-house within reach of the Capital. It had its own small grounds, and marble statuary, and French-windows opening

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out from its main drawing-room on to lawns. It was furnished in the style of 1880, and reminded me of the small country-houses in which the plays of Chekhov take place. It is now occupied by a floating population of thirty or forty workers, who go there, for a week or a fortnight as the case may be, for their holiday. Does the place seem desecrated, at this being turned over to the hands of invaders? I do not think so. The long dining-room was fuller of tables than it would have been in the old days, for it had to accommodate more people. Most of the bedrooms were treated as dormitories, and had two or three white beds ranged along their walls instead of a single state-couch. But the touch of grace and distinction in its parquet-floored drawing-room, its marble groups in alcoves, and its garden-vistas seen through tall windows had been preserved. The place was spotlessly clean and orderly. If the shades of the former owners still keep a gleam of generosity in their hearts, they can feel at least that the place has been put to no base uses.

A Cinema. It was crowded, crowded. We were taken there one evening to see one of the first Russian talkies, "The Passport to Life." It had been running at the same house for three

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months, but its success was so great that there were still crowds waiting and struggling to get in, and not a seat in the place was empty. Personally I considered it very bad. The best of the Russian silent films have been masterpieces, but the new talkie technique has sent them back to the beginning again. It was an affair of close-ups and fights and loud noises and crude lighting. One could not believe that the same studios that made "The End of St. Petersburg" also made this. But even here the story shows which way the Russian zeal for reformation is blowing. The film dealt with the "lost children"—the groups of bandit youth, starving, lawless and desperate, who used to wander about the country, to the number of thousands, in the early years of the Revolution. All contemporary histories have commented on them as one of the worst features of the chaos. They have recently been taken in hand. They have been rounded up and put into special schools to learn trades. They had outbreaks of fighting and murdering one another. At other times they would set fire to the schools and burn them down. The difficulties of the authorities must have been extraordinary. The film gives an intensive picture of some of them. It was largely made by the boys themselves.

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We were taken, again in a motor-charabanc, round the " sights " of the grey city. This was our " treat "—when we could rest the soles of our shoes, trodden almost to nothingness through walking. Had it ever occurred to the authorities that a single good factory-inspection may involve some three or four miles of floor-walking ? Or does enthusiasm blind them all ?

The St. Petersburg of its first builder was laid out in the grand manner, with long, high, treeless boulevards radiating out from its centre—the spire of the Admiralty—with mathematical precision. Paris itself has not boulevards so wide and so straight. A plan of the city looks like a proposition in Euclid. But whereas Paris with its trees and lights is all graciousness and decorative effect, St. Petersburg from the beginning must have given the impression of a barracks. And it is now, to the outward and superficial sight, a barracks that has fallen upon evil days.

I said, with intention, to outward and superficial appearance. There are two different impressions to take away from modern Leningrad; and both of them are correct. To say that it is dirty, shabby, neglected, ill-lighted, with unswept streets and unpainted paint-

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work—that to everyone coming, with their noses in the air, straight out of Bond Street or Park Avenue—it seems at first sight the abomination of desolation, is to say no more than the truth. The superficialities of appearance have up to now been neglected with a contempt that is rigid, absolute—and rather magnificent.

A glance beneath the surface shows why it is magnificent. The authorities of the city have been turning what money they have to deeper and more essential needs than outward appearances. If they were—as they probably will soon—to turn a fraction of the money that they have been spending on education, on new housing, on factories, on kitchens and on clinics (the big new Leningrad central clinic was completed as one of the very first acts of the Soviets)—if they were to divert some of this expenditure to the comparative frivolity of better street-lighting and a few new coats of paint—they could revolutionise the outward appearance of their city in a couple of weeks' labour. It will happen. But it has not happened at the moment.

Leningrad is a city of the past, if you like to take it so. In an even truer sense, it is also a city of the future.

The record of my experiences in it would not

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be complete without mentioning that I was arrested there, on my third day. I was waiting in the Nevsky Prospect for a tram. Knowing that no smoking is allowed on any part of Leningrad trams—and wishing to defer with all courtesy to the law of the land—I dropped my unfinished cigarette into the gutter as the tram approached. Instantly—and as it seemed to my dazed senses, before ever my cigarette-end had reached its gutter resting-place—a whistle blew, a command was given, the hand of a Comrade Militiaman (Leningrad policeman) fell on my shoulder, a crowd assembled from nowhere, and a representative of the might of Britain was under Soviet arrest. . . .

Wide, muddy, cobbled and neglected as are the streets of Leningrad, the Law sees no necessity for them to be made worse by citizens throwing cigarette-ends on them. There are receptacles provided for the purpose. I had transgressed.

I explained that I was an Englishman. The Law relaxed its grip on my shoulder and grinned. And the affair passed off with the unfailing indulgence and courtesy that I never failed to see extended by Russians to the stranger within their gate.

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CHAPTER IV

TWO BEDROOMS

ONE goes to modern Russia to look at modern Russia. But the present grew out of the past—to an extent under-estimated by those who imagine that modern Russia sprang, fully planned, from the brain of a few mad Socialists.

From time to time it is illuminating to look at the work of a few mad Autocrats.

The lay-out of St. Petersburg itself helps to explain how and why the centre of Government came to be shifted from the Czar's study to Lenin's bare white-washed bedroom in the Smolny Institute. If one passes far enough through St. Petersburg one comes across the Taurida Palace. Small, and in an obscure quarter of the city, it was once the home of the Russian Duma or Parliament—which met no more than three or four times in the whole of Russian history—and which was in each case dissolved by the Czar within a few months of its opening. All

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the other Government buildings are impressive buildings. The Winter Palace is an impressive building. The Admiralty next door to it throws its enormous frontage along the Neva quays for nearly half a mile. The former General Staff building, opposite it across the Winter Palace Square, is four times the size of our own War Office. Each of these gives the august feeling of majesty due to its importance in the scheme of a huge and far-flung Empire. But the Parliament Building, where were lodged the elected representatives of a nation of 150,000,000 people . . . remained to the last no more than a small country-house in a suburb.

In the time given to Leningrad I saw a few more of these records in stone, with the corresponding light that they cast on the new régime. Among them were two bedrooms, and a prison cell.

The prison cell was in the Fortress of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, once " the Bastille and the St. Denis of the Romanovs." The Fortress itself had been used for the last two hundred years of their dynasty as a political prison. But with all the rest of Russia to choose from, they also elected to use the Church within the walls of the Fortress as their family burial-ground.

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There they lie, Czars, Czaritsas and Grand-Duchesses, side by side in their stone coffins, not under any free heavens, but self-entombed in the heart of their own State prison. . . . I have mentioned that the mentality of the family was curious.

We were taken through the prison, its cells, corridors, exercise-ground, and the iron cage through whose bars the condemned were allowed to take farewell of their relatives. Lenin's brother had passed through the cage on his way to the Schlusselburg to be executed. Vera Figner had said goodbye to her mother there before passing to the Schlusselburg for nineteen years of imprisonment. The Fortress had always been used as a clearing-house for the Schlusselburg, for Siberia, or for the gallows. Few had ever escaped from it. But we were taken to the cell of one who had escaped.

Her photograph is still on the wall of the cell —a fine, grave young face, with a determined mouth and intelligent eyes and forehead. Her name was Vetrova. She had been sentenced in the reign of Alexander III, that is to say about 1890, for being attached to an illegal printing-works.

The prison cell was not bad as prison cells go —it was even rather larger than the English

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regulation; but the uncertainty of the sentence may have been intolerable to her. She determined to make an end of it. She poured kerosene from the prison-lamp over her clothes, set herself on fire, lingered for two days (as no doctors were allowed to attend political prisoners), and died. The matter was reported to the Autocracy, but by that time she was beyond its clutches.

Tsarskoë-Selo. We take a train for an hour's journey over flat, grey country—low sand-dunes and silver-birches. Tsarskoë-Selo, once the Czar's Village of Palaces, has now changed its name and become Detskoë-Selo, the "Village of Children." The sandy soil is healthy, and they are sent there to rest and recoup.

The small Alexander Palace, ten minutes' walk from the main Palace, is the real interest of the place. This was Nicholas II's own palace, much smaller, much less pretentious, built and run on the lines of a large country-house—a Malmaison rather than a Versailles. It was the normal residence of the last of the Czars. It has been kept as it was when he walked out of it, to Ekaterinburg and death. The maps of the 1917 Russian front in Galicia are still pinned to the billiard-table, and a Red Cross parcel still unopened lies on a sofa in the bedroom of the Czar and the Czaritsa.

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Here now, if one has a mind to moralise on such a matter, one is at the heart of the old régime. As a man, taken out and slaughtered with the rest of his family, the dead Czar is as tragic as any other man who had been so slaughtered, no more and no less. But it is still worth remembering that as a ruler and an Autocrat he had complained that the Jewish pogroms of the years of peace—when dangerous Jews of less than a year old had been hurled from top-storey windows—had not been strong enough. He himself in the years of his authority had had life in his hand and death in his hand, and had used his god-like position with a stupidity that even Royalists have declared to be nearly insane.

Stupidity — fatality — a lack of any human quality with which the grace of intelligence might blend, seem to hover over the inner character of this man, as it shows itself passing through the rooms that he inhabited. There is a fine library in the building—but it was got together by one of his mad ancestors, Paul I. Nicholas himself preferred above all other authors Marie Corelli, and she is the constant theme of correspondence between him and his wife.

The pictures on the walls are not only pathetic ; they are pathological. With all the treasures of

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the Hermitage to choose from, the walls of his most private rooms are covered with *menus* of past banquets framed in bamboo frames, with sunsets and oleographs that no longer find place in English lodging-house parlours, with photographs of relatives in uniform, hung close enough together to obliterate the wallpaper, and with small ikons at the bed-head, not by the dozen but by the score. Surely the virtue of the little tinkling piece of metal called the ikon lay in its being, in reverence and affection, the channel of communication between the owner and his God? But can one need a whole wallful of such channels of communication? A collection of threepenny-pieces, by a man of fifty, father of a family and Autocrat and Overlord of all the Russias, could not have brought one so near to a realisation of the word Futility.

One can go from this bedroom to another bedroom, of another Autocrat and Overlord of All the Russias—to the bedroom of Vladimir Ilych Ulianov Lenin. It is in the Smolny Institute in Leningrad, his headquarters for two years after he had attained to power.

His room is also kept with care in the state in which its owner left it. It is small, and very

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high for its size, as are most anterooms and waiting-rooms that are hidden away in corners of large buildings. Its bareness is as complete as that of a disused attic. It has bare discoloured whitey-grey walls, a stove, a deal wardrobe, a table that could be bought in the Caledonian Market for five shillings, a stretch of bare unpolished floor, a couple of lodging-house chairs, and a plush sofa. A curtain partitions off one end of it. Behind the partition are two iron beds, for Lenin and his wife, Krupskaiya. There are no pictures. Such was Lenin's working-room, not when he was a hunted and exiled refugee, but when he ruled at the height of his power, with a greater authority than any Czar had ever possessed.

Here indeed, in this narrow room, one could survey the centre of a despotism—but unlike other despotisms in that, possibly for the first time in the world's history, it was a despotism out to gain nothing whatever for itself.

The poverty of the room is absolute. The rigour of his life, for the thirty years of exile while he prepared the Revolution and in his four years of power and triumph, was absolute. One was later to see, in Moscow, evidence of the adoration in which his memory is still held by the

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people that he ruled. But here in the Smolny one could catch a glimpse of the selflessness and asceticism on which this adoration was built.

One recalls in this room some of his passing remarks, recorded and now used on banners and in classrooms as slogans of the Revolution—sane as they are always, but with their sanity reinforced with a thunderbolt. "What is Socialism? Soviet Power *plus* Electrification." Already, in his first days of office, he had seen that change of government meant nothing unless enormous new forces of mechanisation and industrialisation were also brought to birth along with it.

He recurred to the theme again and again. "One engineer is always worth ten revolutionaries!" "One single piece of practice is worth a dozen Socialist discussions." "If we had thought," he writes about the early years of government, "that we could change people's lives by issuing two hundred contradictory edicts, we should have been first-class idiots. They were useful as showing the goal that we aimed to reach. What is wanted now is long hours of careful work and detailed planning. It is not exciting. . . . But it is needed, and the people will be grateful to us for it."

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And is there not something human and sensitive and touching in the remark that he made late in life to Gorky, when prodigies of work on the part of his own sick body were driving him to the grave—"I can hardly bear to listen to music these days," he said, "it affects one's nerves too painfully. It makes one want to talk nonsense and stroke people's heads. . . ." Who would have thought that *his* life could have retained any sensitiveness to music in it—when for fifty years it had been husbanding itself for the greatest explosion of human energy that the world has ever known?

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CHAPTER V

MOSCOW

THE difference in outward appearance between the cities of Leningrad and Moscow is the difference between Winter and Spring. Leningrad being Winter.

I have suggested that in Leningrad, if one looks beneath the surface, one can find plenty of signs of reviving life; that its apparent decay and disruption is the matter of a great many new coats of paint that have not yet been given it.

But the kindliest impression of Leningrad, even after this has been allowed for, is that it is a city that still needs taking in hand. Moscow is a city that is being taken in hand already.

One arrives there after an all-night journey from the former Capital. That all-night journey! The crowd on the Leningrad station had again resembled the crowd at an English Cup-Final. But our places on the train had been reserved. " Hard-Class " turned out to be farcical, but not

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more uncomfortable than we could bear. There were six men in one compartment, and six women in the other. As the partition between the two compartments was no higher than the back of a carriage seat, segregation was less than complete. The wooden bunk let down from the wall allowed one to stretch out full-length, and we were given thin mattresses and rolls of sealed bedding. We kept on most of our day-clothes, and I personally slept like the dead. The women of the party did not. The luggage of Madame Pavlinova, the new guide who had taken us over for the Moscow journey, consisted of a tin can of hot-water (for making midnight tea), a brown-paper parcel, and a tennis-racquet. . . .

Long before one gets to Moscow one has a sense of the radiation of its activity. For the last hour of the journey I stood in the carriage corridor watching the morning sunlight play over the flat country-side—its small slopes and valleys, its clumps of silver-birch and larch and pine and fir, and then more silver-birch. But for an hour of the morning's run before reaching Moscow the low sky-line is scarred by power-cables and tall new buildings, store-houses, factories and large blocks of workers'-dwellings towering up in the middle of the suburban villages. For twenty

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miles before one enters it, the presence of the new Capital makes itself felt.

On arrival we were motored to our hotel for breakfast, and almost immediately afterwards herded into an open motor-charabanc and whisked right round the town for a first inspection. (It was this sort of thing that filled me with admiration for the organisation of the tour. Amateurish and extemporised as it often was, it yet sometimes had touches of very intelligent imagination. After a rough all-night journey, the natural inclination of most of the party, left to themselves, would have been to go to sleep. But time was short, and that would have been a waste of time. The one thing that displeased nobody was to sit in an open car and let the morning air play on our faces. Motor-transport is still scarce all over Russia, and one felt the more grateful to the authorities for letting us have it when they could.)

We were driven round, through, and about the town. . . . The first impact that it makes on the new visitor is more fascinating than that of any other city in Europe except Constantinople—with which, in fact, it has something in common.

Unlike Leningrad, Moscow is a town of trees and boulevards and parks. Unlike Leningrad, its

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streets are not straight and geometrical, but narrow and winding and tortuous. Successive generations of inhabitants have built them out in irregular concentric circles from the ancient Citadel, the Kremlin. Our hotel was part of a sort of minor citadel of its own, on another hill, bounded by an old fortification wall called the "Chinese Wall."

Leningrad is "new." Nothing in Leningrad dates back to before the eighteenth-century. It was a marsh, a morass, an uninhabited ice-berg at the mouth of a deserted river, before Peter the Great commanded it to furnish a site for his new Capital. Every other corner of Moscow contains a building that goes back beyond the Middle-Ages, to some dim Asiatic antiquity.

Leningrad is a city of Rastrelli and the European architects of the Baroque period. Moscow was built by architects who lived in an age when architects were the private property of their owners, and when, as happened in the case of the amazing St. Basil Cathedral, they were liable to have their eyes put out at the end of their labours for fear they should later create anything more beautiful.

Leningrad is grey, under lowering skies—or where the stucco is not grey, it is painted the

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colour of stale mustard. Moscow lives its life under higher, wider, brighter skies, and its houses and its sixteen hundred churches, with their spires and domes rising gold against the sky-line are painted pink, blue, green and salmon-colour, and every other colour known under heaven.

Leningrad (once St. Petersburg) is grim and overpowering and heavy. "Be Paris and Berlin together!" seems to have said its first owner, forgetting that its latitude lies north of the Hebrides. Moscow, with a dash of the Asiatic ever present in it, overflows in fantasy and gold filigree embellishments and barbaric *décor*. The Tartar outline of the Kremlin silhouette has massiveness and dignity. But the Basil Cathedral outside it is like the dream-creation of a madman, obsessed with visions of mermaids' palaces miles under the sea. Limpets, sea-urchins, whelks, radishes, star-fish and sea-snails have been the inspiration of the forms of its turrets and cupolas.

Like the first appearance of the Zebra to the child's astonished vision, "Mummie, it can't be true!"

The change in the looks of the populace is as surprising. The people in Moscow are not well dressed (by standards of Bond Street), but they are far better dressed than the Leningrad crowd.

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Again, Moscow is now the centre of Government, with all the bustle and radiation of activity that this entails. There is a gap in the centre of Leningrad, like the gap where a tooth has been torn out of a jaw, where the former centre of Government, with its disused palaces and offices, once was.

Yet again, in the streets of Moscow there are cars! There are not many of them, by London standards, and those that there are, apart from a dozen or so of new taxis, are Government and business cars, and are attached to offices and to works. But they bound gaily about over the uneven cobbles, and one had been for so long without the sight of them that they seemed like the mechanical transport of a Metropolis. In Leningrad the number of cars that one would see in an entire morning's walk, could be counted on the fingers of two hands.

On the first evening M. and T. and I decided to go, independently of the rest of the party, to the Ballet. M. had been captivated by Karsarvina's autobiography, "Theatre-Street," and had been anticipating as one of the climaxes of the Russian expedition the thrill of crossing the threshold of a theatre that had once been the home of the Imperial Russian Ballet.

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Disillusion and paradox!—at least, as far as the performance of the ballet, the "Red Poppy." One had come to Russia expecting disillusionment over many things—but its art-output had not been among them. To my surprise, the feeble-ferocious "Red Poppy" was the one manifestation of modern Russian civilisation that I disliked. It was long, in the bad three-act ballet tradition, and it was dull. After a not bad first act, its Communistic and Revolutionary propaganda (the Red Poppy being the symbol of revolt), seemed to be its only purpose and life. It had been mounted sumptuously and regardless of expense; there must have been a couple of hundred figures on the great stage at one time; but the *décor* was as gaudy and tasteless as that of a provincial pantomime.

It was a favourite ballet, however, continually revived in the repertory, and it had drawn a full house. Here at least was something to look at —the aspect of an immense Opera House, holding not far short of three thousand people, and every one of those people, with the exception of ourselves, the products of proletarianised Russia!

What did they look like? Backgrounded by the plush and gilding and crystal chandeliers of an earlier régime, did they give the appearance of

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three thousand navvies projected into the middle of a Buckingham Palace ball-room? Not at all! I do not know why they did not, but they did not. They wore among them every variety of costume save only European evening-dress. There were "intelligentsia," dressed much like the intelligentsia of all other nations, in dark suits and white collars. There was the more strictly "working" element, dressed again in dark suits, but often with the high-buttoned worker's blouse doing duty for shirt and collar. And there were the sheer fantastics of costume, visitors from the outlying provinces, dressed in brightly embroidered shirts and blouses, with coloured sashes, with riding-breeches, with high black Russian leather boots. . . . All were alike only in that they were all washed and brushed and well-mannered, that they were keenly enjoying the spectacle, and that they had turned themselves out for an evening at the Opera with a genuine sense that it was an "occasion."

We shared our box with three Communist youths, dressed in the fashionable dark, high-buttoned blouses. Immediately the first interval began they tried to get into conversation. Seeing me spelling through a programme—I was in process of mastering the Russian alphabetical

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characters—they asked me to read out loud as much as I could, and were highly amused at my efforts. They were also diverted by the fact that we were each carrying English-Russian phrase-books, and tried to continue a friendly if futile discussion by their use. Then a Russian who had a few words of English leant over from the next box and engaged M. in discussion, and a Russian engineer from Siberia, in yet another box, started a conversation in German with me. . . .

The surprise of all this was considerable. The two girls and I were obviously, from our appearance and our speech, trippers and foreigners. We were trippers and foreigners from a country which up till 1922 was financing expeditions against Russia, and which has never ceased to talk evil, and often misinformed and libellous evil, against Russia ever since. And yet an unattached party of us had not been ten minutes alone in a theatre before three separate groups of our neighbours had shown themselves friendly disposed towards us, and had gone out of their way to conduct themselves as " hosts " of the place.

I was to meet this again and again later, and during the whole time that I was in Russia. If I asked my way in the intricate streets of Moscow, I would always find someone not only to direct

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me carefully, but to put me some distance on my way. When I was travelling alone on all-day and all-night journeys, after the rest of my party had gone back to England—when I was travelling, that is to say, as an ordinary traveller among a train-load of Russian fellow-travellers—I would usually be approached by one of them who could speak either French or German, and through his agency would be kept in eager and friendly discussion, once nearly the whole night through, with the rest of the compartment and with other Russians who would crowd in from the compartments next door. In general I found them interested enough in me as an Englishman, and in what as a visiting Englishman I thought of them, to go to any lengths to get into conversation.

But I did not know this when I first set foot in Russia—had I not been warned that "Englishmen were so unpopular that they had to go about in groups?"—and the visit to the Moscow Grand Opera was my first experience of it.

I should have mentioned that yet another surprise awaited us: seats at the Grand Opera in Moscow are not cheap! We had paid ten shillings each for our seats in a second-tier box. The best seats in the house—and every seat in the house was full—cost the English equivalent of £1.

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Where was the theory of the "Oppressed slaves of Communism" now. . . ?

"How do the Russians manage to do it? I thought that they had no money at all!" I have heard this remark and this query a hundred times since I have been back in England. Part of the explanation is that Russians are given wages just like anyone else; and part of it that, unlike most Englishmen, they are mad about all things connected with the theatre. I went later to the Opera again, to the theatre, to various cinemas, and even to a Circus (which held two thousand people, and where clowns were falling off bicycles and imitating Charlie Chaplin). With the single exception of an 11 p.m. performance of an educational film at a small cinema in the provinces, I never came across a place of entertainment that was not full—and by full I mean full in the literal sense, with every seat occupied. I was assured by English and American residents who had lived long in Moscow that this is the normal thing.

It is now time to say a word on the vexed question of Prices. I have said that seats cost £1. How far does an English £1 equal a Russian £1. Is a Rouble really worth 2*s*.?

Nowhere are mistakes more often made, and

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more often repeated. Once a week in the London press, if not more often, are seen little paragraphs announcing "on the authority of a Norwegian sailor whose ship called at a Russian Black-Sea port" or by some similar currency expert, that "boots cost Ten Pounds a pair in Russia, and that butter costs twelve shillings a pound." . . . The details vary. The Norwegian sailor is occasionally a ship's doctor and a Swede. Suits of clothes and legs of mutton may replace butter and boots as representative staple commodities. But always the misunderstanding (if one is charitably to call it that) is the same.

The explanation in general outline is as follows, leaving the absurdity of the newspaper reports to be already self-evident. (If boots cost the equivalent of a genuine £10 English a pair, and if everyone in Russia wears them, then Russia must already be a very rich nation indeed.)

Russia, instead, is still a poor nation, *bound by the condition of having to export many sorts of goods that its own population could use, in order to pay for the plant, machinery and foreign experts that its immediate industrialisation needs.* This condition will not continue, but is in full force and operation now.

To meet it, the authorities have decreed two

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separate scales of prices, one for necessities, and another for everything beyond fairly restricted needs. Every man and woman working in Russia has the right to buy certain necessities—bread, meat, sugar, a suit of clothes, boots, and so forth—in certain quantities, at Government or co-operative shops, and to buy them reasonably *cheap*. What he or she wants over and above this, whatever is his or her own particular luxury desire, even if it is an extra half-pound of butter, has to be bought in the " open " shops, and often to be bought extremely dear. It is not an ideal arrangement. Many quite simple things still cost far more in Russia than they do in England. The nation is denying itself every luxury—save only those of education and culture—in order to carry out its Five-Year industrialisation plan. Later Five-Year Plans will be to increase its own comfort and ease.

As it works out at the moment, a man may reasonably expect to be able to buy most of the necessities of life, and still leave himself after this a fair fraction of his pay. How he spends the rest of it is his own concern, but he will have to think carefully about it. His ration of butter and sugar will not have cost him much—but if he wants to buy more than his ration it will cost

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him much more. His first suit of clothes will have been reasonably cheap—his second and third will be dear. The same with his boots, the difference sometimes being three or four times as much.

From this sketch, rough and incomplete as it is, it will at least be seen that it is ludicrously misleading to speak about "boots costing £10 a pair in Russia" (which figure itself is a lie) unless it is *also* quite clearly stated that this applies only to extra, or luxury, pairs of boots. Before this, the man will have been able to buy his ordinary, wearing supply of boots at a figure proportionate to his income—possibly at a half, or a quarter, or a sixth of the price.

I take it that almost every authority on every London paper must be perfectly aware of this. If not, he should be. And yet, because it affords an easy slap at the Soviet Government, no week passes without some fantastic record of "Russian prices" being printed in a London paper.

A single further doubt may be set at rest: "How does the English tripper come off, since, on entering the country, he has to exchange good English money, at an arbitrary exchange-rate, for depreciated Russian roubles?" The answer

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is simple. Spoliation of the tripper is no part of the system. There are a couple of special "Tourist shops" in Leningrad, Moscow and elsewhere, where the tripper can buy everything that he is likely to want—cigarettes, food, drinks, fruit, and even clothes and carpets—at rates that allow him full value for his exchanged English money. Very good Russian cigarettes cost, according to brand, between 7*d.* and 1*s.* a packet of twenty—that is to say, cheaper than in England. (Russians themselves have to pay more for cigarettes, and the good brands are not available to them.) Biscuits, fruit and tinned stuff are about the same price as in England. The chief drink available, vodka, is cheap : a half-litre bottle for 3*s.* is enough to intoxicate a regiment.

Recollections of Moscow : The Kremlin—and returns to our hotel ; some enormous blocks of new Workmen's dwellings—and returns to our hotel ; a "People's Court of Justice," and a Marriage office and a Divorce office, and a Prison—and returns to the hotel ; Lenin's Tomb in Red Square under the stars of a September night, and the battery of flood-lights trained on it from the opposite houses—and a rush to the railway-station for the night train that was to

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take us to Nijni-Novgorod. (The Hotel, insignificant in itself, becomes important as the starting-point and returning-point of all expeditions. It was an hotel of what might be called the second-class. The "Metropole," the "Europe" and the "Grand" are the three great hotels of the place. Our own, where we were fairly comfortably lodged, and where meals were fairly good, and where hot baths could be had by arrangement, continually reminded me of any European hotel in Constantinople. There were the same large, empty corridors, the same uncarpeted staircases, dirty table-cloths, palms in pots, flies, and attempts at an alien civilisation that no one understands or cares about. But it sufficed.)

I took away a confused impression of the whole town in my mind, some of which confusion was cleared up later when I came back, away from the rest of the Tourist party, and spent long days with the Correspondents and journalists who lived there permanently.

The Kremlin itself made the finest of side-shows. It is a city within a city. It has within its walls blocks of Government offices, a Museum, an Imperial Palace, and four Cathedrals. . . . We were taken over it by a brilliant guide, a girl, shabbily dressed, who had learnt her English in

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America, and from whose lips poured a flood of the purest Chicago. All the guides are propagandists, at least to the extent of contrasting steeply the best of the new régime with the worst of the old régime. But our vociferous American did her propaganda by a series of jokes and irreverencies. In one of the Cathedrals she pointed out a row of little ikons hung on the wall —small gilded paintings on wood, of slightly different sizes, but generally a foot or so long, and a little less in width. Each had been placed there in turn to commemorate the birth of some Grand-Duke or Czarevitch back in the early years of the dynasty, and tradition held that each ikon had to be made exactly of the length and breadth of the new-born infant. "As one or two of the ikons happen to be perfectly square . . . !" says the guide, with a shrug of her shoulders and a grin; and leaves us to infer for ourselves how fantastic are traditions when left to themselves to grow up through the centuries.

She pointed out a spire of one of the Cathedrals. One of the mediaeval Czars was so pleased with its height that he had decreed by law, and for perpetuity, that no one in Russia should ever build a higher. She jerks her head backwards at a spot on the horizon whence rises the immense

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new tower of the Moscow Radio station. "Under Bolshevism the law has been broken . . . !"

In the Cathedral is kept a record of the expenses of the Coronation of the last of the Czars. It cost 7,000,000 roubles—three-quarters of a million pounds. There is also a record kept of the disaster that happened on the same day when two thousand people crushed each other to death owing to the bad Police arrangements—and of the historic fact of the Czar, on hearing of it, refusing to cancel a Court Ball arranged for the same night.

We went to look over a prison. It was slackly kept and dirty. Soap is dear in Russia, and brushes are dear. But whereas a *washing down* of certain floors and corridors seems to be general, a genuine *scrubbing down* seems to be outside the Russian philosophy. The prisoners were lounging about doing very little. The scene might have been a Rowlandson drawing of Newgate or the Fleet. The Governor, an intelligent, mild-eyed man looking like a character in Chekhov, addressed us through an interpreter. Punishment is "reformative" in Russia. Trades are taught. Small wages are given for work done. The prisoners are allowed to some extent to

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govern themselves. The warders are prisoners of good character. (The smartest-looking prisoner of the lot was one of my old fraternity, a theatre-manager . . . serving a year or two for having bilked the Government in the matter of a contract.) The prisoners are given a fortnight's holiday a year with their families, and apparently turn up again. In the summer, some of them are allowed to return to their own villages to help with the harvest. The death-penalty, except for crimes against the State, has been abolished in Russia, and the longest sentence, even for Murder, is ten years. My chief criticism of the prison was its unsweptness and its dirt, judging by English standards. I have not the least doubt that under the old régime prisons were a lot dirtier.

We returned through the rain—it had been raining the whole morning, and we had been kept waiting long in the prison courtyards—sneezing and scratching.

We proceeded to a "People's Court," at the other end of the town, held in a room that might have been a school-room, and presided over by a young man who looked as though he might have been an artizan. He happened to be the Presiding

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Judge of the place, trained to the work, and making it his permanent profession. He was helped by two people at his side—two "Elected People's Representatives." These latter serve three months each, and then return to their ordinary work. They form, as it were, a small Jury of two, and after their three months are replaced by others. They may be either men or women. In the neighbouring Court the Presiding Judge happened to be a woman. She was a striking personality, dressed as any ordinary middle-aged peasant-woman is dressed, but with an intelligence in her mouth and eyes that would have made her remarkable anywhere. She was holding the Court as in the hollow of her hands, controlling it, speeding it up, gimleting the truth out of witnesses with a mixture of friendliness, acumen, and concentration that made one of the most remarkable exhibitions of efficiency that I have ever seen. How could an old peasant woman do this? It seems to me that after having spent most of her life cattle-dealing in village markets, she was probably "up to" any lies that any town witnesses were likely to tell her, before they had ever opened their mouths. . . .

I went back later and saw more of such

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"People's Courts," and also was told many of the decisions that they had given, by Europeans who were interested in the matter. On the whole, by putting Justice into the hands, and on the honour of, the "People," fairly equitable justice seemed being done. Some of the decisions were striking in their unconventionality and their fairness. There had been a case where a man and his wife and a lodger had shared a flat. The woman had divorced the husband and married the lodger. Later the lodger had taken out a gun and tried to shoot the husband. This happens to be a rather severe crime under Bolshevik law. Matrimonial jealousy is looked down upon as a "Bourgeois" failing, and Crimes of Passion are discouraged. The woman Judge in the case, however, had gone to the root of the matter; had elicited the fact that the woman had been egging the men on into rivalry for the sake of her own vanity; had discharged the man, against all Soviet law and precedent—and had convicted the woman. . . . In another case, a promising young man, a Member of the Communist Party, was being sued for alimony for the support of a child that a girl alleged to be his. The case was doubtful. The young man swore it was not. (It should be mentioned that under

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Soviet law a father is required to contribute to the support of his child for the first *eighteen years* of its life.) As there seemed no method of getting at the truth, the Judge—again a woman—tried a last expedient. She shouted across the Court at him, "*Remember! The Word of Honour of a Communist is the most important thing that he possesses, and must never be broken!*" The young man rushed away from the Court, had a look at the child that he had not seen before, recognised it as a likeness to himself, came back into Court, asked for the case to be reopened, and assumed full responsibility. . . .

The story sounds like a fairy-tale—or at least like material for a propagandist one-act play to convert the Infidel to Bolshevism; but it happens to be authentic.

We were taken to a large new block of Workmen's dwellings in the Moscow suburbs. I had seen others in Leningrad, and was later to see many more in the Provincial towns. They are all built on the same principle—small flats for the individual family, with large communal dining-rooms, reading-rooms, study-rooms, nurseries and crèches. Every large block has in it a series of rooms set apart as a sort of Maternity

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Centre, where instruction is given in everything to do with young children, their pre-natal care, bathing them, feeding them, and cleaning their teeth when they arrive at an age to possess teeth. Instruction in the use of contraceptives is given if it is asked for. Illegal operations, undertaken before a certain early date in pregnancy, are not illegal, but they are in no sense encouraged. Inasmuch as the Soviet law gives to every woman who is a mother, whether she is married or unmarried, *four months' holiday with full pay* when she has a child, free medical attention, especial privileges in the matter of food and milk, and for a year afterwards an hour's less work a day (again on full pay), the Soviet Government may be said to do less to encourage illegal operations than any other Government in modern Europe. . . .

Babies abound. One sees serried ranks of them in the crèche part of the building, playing in their play-rooms, eating in their miniature refectories, with miniature tables and chairs to match, and sleeping in their cots on verandahs facing the sun. They are the best things in the country, clean, well-fed, well looked-after, and surrounded by attendants who impress one immediately with their seriousness and their worth.

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The slightly elder children are also to be seen. They are friendly and bold. They seem to like walking round with the visitors holding their hands. The friendliness is not engendered by any hopes of tips or chocolate, for on the two occasions when M. tried offering chocolate to the children who had conceived an affection for her, and who insisted on walking the corridors with their arms round her waist, once it was refused altogether, and the other time was only accepted after long consultation with a higher authority.

In one of the flats where the owners were away working, we saw a maid-servant peeling potatoes for a midday meal. Astonishment . . . ! One had a vague conception that in Russia householders were not allowed to employ such a thing as a maid-servant. As it happens, if the joint wages of the man and the wife can afford it they are at perfect liberty to do so.

In general, the appearance and plan of the blocks of flats is like that of the corresponding buildings in Vienna. They are built, where it is possible, round large courtyards, facing South to entrap the sun, and with balconies for enjoying the sun. In one of the Moscow blocks, a new one and a good one, there were 240 flats, of which 40 had their own bathrooms, and the rest shared

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bathrooms at the rate of two to each passage. The important difference in appearance between the Russian and the Viennese blocks of flats is that the Viennese Municipality had had a shade more money to spend on outside looks and comeliness. The design of the Russian buildings is good and modern—but everything has had to be kept strictly utilitarian. Russia is still a poor country; Russia is still in the throes of a struggle to industrialise itself from conditions, not merely fifty years out of date, but from the backwardness of the eighteenth-century. There has not yet been a farthing to spend on flourishes. In Vienna there has been just enough money over to put in the courtyards a few trees, a statue or two, perhaps a bathing-pool for the children—some hint of graciousness or beauty that turns the new buildings into a delight for the eye.

Russia will achieve this later, among other Five-Year Plans—perhaps before. In the meantime, the best of the new buildings are palaces and paradises compared with the housing conditions of a few years back.

The Moscow Broadcasting Station is lodged in the new General Post-Office building. M., who works for the B.B.C. in London, developed a

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passion to see the place. A special visit was arranged for her, as it is no part of the usual trip. A young mechanic, with the manners of a young Grand Duke, showed us round. The Radio is looked upon as an important part of education and culture. Money had been spent upon the place. There was a beautiful small concert-hall. The studios were clean and new, and with their parquet floors and tall grey velvet curtains, had an air of elegance that contrasted with the shabby-gentility of all older, pre-Revolution buildings in Russia.

The interest for an Englishman was to see how, with a difference in space of a thousand miles, and a difference of Political outlook traversing all creeds and religions, the personnel of such an institution as a broadcasting station remained identically the same in Moscow as in London. The Staff might have been an English Staff in Savoy Hill. I could identify instantly which were the Producers, which the mechanical and transmission experts, and which the framers of programmes. The mummer's art is one which transcends boundaries. " Back-stage " in Moscow is the same as back-stage in Paris or London or Warsaw. In one of the studios, a young leading-lady was rehearsing—attractively dressed, giving

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herself the airs which young leading-ladies are wont to give themselves the world over, even in front of the blind and incorruptible microphone. Russian Wireless programmes give a constant proportion of 33 per cent Music, 33 per cent Entertainment, and 33 per cent Education and Political Propaganda.

A Registry Office for Marriage. A small room on the ground floor of a block of flats—the quarters that correspond to the *concierge's* living-rooms in a Parisian mansion. An attempt had been made to smarten the apartment up and to give it a slightly more festal air than that of the usual Government office—certainly than that of an English Registrar's Office. The parquet floor had a couple of rugs on it. The Empire furniture had its own grace. The Official in charge of it was a young girl, a Government clerk, of about twenty, with bare legs. The Marriage Market was not moving briskly that day—it was a day of appalling downpour—and only one couple was waiting for her services. There were no applicants for Divorce. Divorce was formerly granted merely on the request of one of the parties. A " questionnaire " is now put before the claimants. They need not fill it in if they do not want to,

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and in no case is divorce denied to those who wish it and who agree to the recognised claims for maintenance of children of the marriage. But a new attempt is being made to discover why Divorce is so frequent, and if possible to amend the Law towards putting a check on it.

English and American observers who know most about the matter are unanimous on one or two aspects of it. One of these is that the existing laws are admittedly temporary. They are continually being changed and modified, and will be changed and modified still further. The Government is seriously trying, by experiment, to work out a code that shall be fair and permanently acceptable to the majority. "Licence" is much less thought about than the protection and maintenance and education of the children of any and all unions. Another point is that, good or bad as are the Divorce Laws of the moment, they have at least abolished the swamp of lies and perjuries and general shame that Western civilisation still seems to insist on as first and unalterable essentials. Yet another is, that under the new system, Prostitution has come nearer towards being abolished than in any civilisation of which we have any record. Its cause has been abolished. Every woman and every girl can get work in

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Russia, and at equal wages with a man doing the same work.

I have heard it urged against the system, again by observers who have watched it in operation for some years, that the extreme frequency of divorce is a mistake; that marriages are broken, as the result of a quarrel or a slight difference of opinion, that in other circumstances would probably tide over and become happy ones. I have heard it said that as a result of the economic independence of women, a great many young women not only refuse to permit themselves more "licence," but have developed an indifference to young men that is complete. . . . Domestic morals within the Soviet are obviously not yet perfection. But the net gain, denied by no one, is that no woman or girl in the land need either marry or sell herself for money; that divorce is freed of perjury; that the maintenance of children is made the responsibility of parents for the first eighteen years of their lives; and that just half the babies are allowed to die under Soviet rule who were allowed to die in the last years of the reign of the Czar. Regarded as a beginning, it is a respectable achievement.

"Lenin's Tomb—it is so important you can't

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imagine!" had said one of the Guides to us. We had missed it by going elsewhere on our own when the rest of the official party went to visit it. We had been meaning to repair this omission every day we had been in Moscow, but we only got time at five o'clock on the last evening, being then due to leave for Nijni-Novgorod at eight.

I think three of us were glad that we finally saw it among Russians, standing and waiting our turn in a queue like the rest, instead of being rushed through out of turn in an Intourist party. But we had to wait an hour for the privilege.

The red granite Tomb in Red Square, at the foot of the Kremlin walls, is open to the public from five to seven o'clock every evening. The crowd that assembles to file through it each evening is not numbered in scores nor in hundreds, but in thousands. The Tomb receives a daily homage that is given to the Whitehall Cenotaph itself on one day of the year only—on November 11th. The crowd is quiet and orderly. There is not a policeman or a uniformed official of any sort in sight, except the two sentries who stand one on either side of the doorway. This is a small detail, but it is remarkable. On the night that I was there the queue was made up of about three thousand people, forming themselves of their own

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accord, two and three abreast, in an immense slow-moving snake. It struck me that in England no crowd of more than a few hundred is ever allowed to collect without policemen keeping an eye on it to see fair play. The queue in front of the Mausoleum was entirely unshepherded.

We waited an hour before it came our turn to enter, while the evening sky went from bright blue to grey and purple behind the spires of the Cathedral, and the clock in one of the towers of the Kremlin reminded us that every minute we were coming nearer to missing our train. The Tomb is less the size of a house than of a large cottage. It is built as a child might build something out of a box of bricks, in the shape of a larger cube, surmounted by a smaller cube, of red granite. It is snub and massive, and would be ugly except that it contrives to be impressive. Above the lintel is a twenty-ton monolith of granite with the single word ЛЕНИН—LENIN.

One passes down marble stairs, in a hot red glare of electric light. Right-handed at the bottom of the staircase is the glass case, like something in a museum, that holds the embalmed Lenin. There are two more sentries there, and a further glare of red light reflected back from the red and white marble walls. One passes

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round, and up another staircase, and so out to the night air.

Is he a wax-work? It is impossible to tell. In the peculiar artificial glow of red lighting that fills the place, and that reminds one of the stage-effect when Hell opens to engulf Don Giovanni, even the living, filing in front of the crystal coffin, have the air of wax-works. A couple of medical students who had also seen the figure told me that many corpses take on the appearance of wax-works, and that to the best of their belief the embalmed Lenin is genuinely the embalmed Lenin. I have a memory of a massive domed forehead, familiar already in photographs, of a short *reddish* beard (the red was a surprise), and of hands that seemed never to have had blood running through their veins. But perhaps the medical students are right. The whole monument, in its key and its character, is interesting in its proud and arrogant defiance of the traditional God, and of the traditional Church rites and reverences. It did not succeed aesthetically, at least on me, because, having abandoned a formula, its architects had failed to find another as satisfactory. In their determination that Lenin should sleep his last Red sleep surrounded by no single thing that either in its shape or colour

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should bear resemblance to the traditional Chapel in a Cathedral, the architects and designers have been forced back upon Modernity —and Modernity had produced something that has a slight resemblance to a Berlin Cinema-Palace. One leaves the poor dead figure where it has set up its everlasting rest in the red glare of its Cinema-cottage, and goes out into the night with one's aesthetic sensibilities unawakened.

But if aesthetic sensibilities are not disturbed, something else is touched to life. It is Imagination. If the Tomb arrangements are not impressive, the quiet crowd that gathers outside it is enormously impressive. It is witness—without flourish, in stark simplicity—of the love and the respect of an entire nation. If Lenin had led them to Elysian Fields of ease and plenty, it would be easy to understand. But he led them to no Elysian Fields. He died in the middle of wars and famine, leaving them only, as his legacy, perhaps the boldest and hardest scheme that the brain of man has ever conceived. He died before any gleam of its fulfilment had come into sight. They have endured, since his death, nine years of its worst hardships. And still, as the quiet crowds bear witness, they feel him to have been their man.

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One remembers the closing words of Zarathustra: "Take heed lest a statue crush you!" Is not a nation that can worship so blindly, in danger of worshipping something that may in time become merely a propagandist myth? Yet Lenin's own words are there to give the answer. There is his devastating honesty and recognition of his own limitations: the confession made a few hours after he had first attained to power, "We have great difficulties ahead of us. We are old, hardened Revolutionaries; we have not learned to carry on industry and the State; but we shall learn." How could a nation mistrust a man who knew so well where to mistrust—and to trust—himself?

He mistrusted rhetoric and he trusted discipline. "Bring discipline into play yourselves, the strictest discipline. . . . Learn from the German *his* discipline; otherwise we are a lost people and shall lie for ever in the dust of slavery. . . . There must be no talking in fine phrases. . . ." Again and again he went back to the same thesis, since he mistrusted theory and worshipped practice—and liked honesty better than either: "We still have a lot to learn from any shop-assistant who has spent ten years behind the counter and knows what's what. . . . The Bolsheviks have

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done an enormous number of stupid things . . . our failures and mistakes. . . . What is wanted is no longer politics, but the most prosaic of detail work. . . . For this the people will be grateful, and only if we realise what the people want shall we be able to rule." Is it a new departure in the history of the world that a ruler should begin drawing public attention to the "failures and mistakes" that he himself has made—and is it surprising that the public should pay some respect to such a ruler?

Lastly, there are the years of exile in Siberia, the bare whitewashed rooms that he returned to in St. Petersburg, the fact that power and the Dictatorship of All the Russias scarcely brought to this ascetic a suit of new clothes. . . . Is it extraordinary that to many in Russia Lenin's life seems a life lived out in their service?

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CHAPTER VI

MADAM PAVLINOVA, THE VOLGA AND THE PROVINCES

"YOU want to know when I rest?" says our Guide, the never-ruffled Madame Pavlinova, "I rest when I am dead, and not before!"

The departure from Moscow had been the usual struggle. It would seem that Cup-Finals are perpetually happening in Russia. The platform for the Nijni-Novgorod train might have been the platform at Twickenham on one of its big days. Luckily our train-seats were again reserved.

The Moscow hotel had put its best foot forward in the matter of our last meal, as hotels had a habit of doing once the time of our departure drew near. The table-cloths had been as spotted, and the flies as thick, and the palms in their pots as dusty, as on the day we arrived. But we had been regaled—suddenly, out of the blue—with partridge, sauté potatoes, tongue, gherkins, ices and tea. . . . The food, as I have mentioned, was never very bad. There was always enough of

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it to allow one, if one did not like the look of the meat-course, to pass it by and subsist on the soups and the fishes. But at times it was suddenly much better (or worse) than at others.

Madame Pavlinova had us under her wing again. She had been supplemented in Moscow by a small young Assistant Guide, a friendly creature of twenty-two, with fine grey eyes, who took farewell of us at the station. The younger guide had seized the occasion of our going to have her hair bobbed and attended to. She appeared at the final supper flushed and self-conscious. It is so unusual to see anyone in Russia who has either the time or the money or the inclination to go in for such small frivolities as personal appearance, that the small frivolity became a major frivolity. It was laughed at and commented on and flattered. The unregenerate part of one's nature—the part, shall we say, that had not yet been born anew of the Soviet Word and Spirit—felt that a couple of roubles had been well spent at last. The Guides, as a race, have a privileged time. They seem to like their work, and for the most part are excellently good at it. But their comparative shabbiness—a shabbiness common to everyone else at the moment in Russia—shows up the more distinctly in contrast with the foreign

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trippers that they escort. None of the guides that I ever went round with had good shoes. They were worn and down-at-heel and pathetic. The smart shoes of the American men and women made the contrast the more glaring. Every wet day I hoped anew that the Soviet Government would get its shoe-manufactories going soon.

Madame Pavlinova, our permanent guide, was a character. She was forty-five (at a guess)—placid and stolid and incapable of being chivvied, had anyone been cruel enough to wish to do so. She adored night-journeys, and came alive the morning after the worst of them blooming like a full-blown peony refreshed after a shower of rain. "We get some tea at the third station, yes?" she would say as the train pulled out, "or if not we organise some tea!" We never got any tea at the third station, but true to her word she always "organised" some tea, with her curious travelling paraphernalia of tin buckets full of water and brown-paper parcels full of comestibles. Speculation existed as to whether under the old régime she had been a *prima ballerina*, an aristocrat, or a theatrical lodging-house landlady. Her charming temperament combined the best features of each. Actually, she was a girl of good family who had been a trained hospital nurse.

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"Do you know what time I go to bed last night?" said Madame Pavlinova during the rigours of the Nijni journey. "I go to bed at 2.30 a.m.! I go half across Moscow to see my brother, and I sit up talking to him till then. I never rest. I say to myself that there will be plenty of time to rest when I am dead. But I do not want to rest before."

This lady of forty-five is a born revolutionary; it is in her bones and in her blood. She could not conceal it from us had she wished to. It was a spontaneous flowering of the spirit. During the long journey up the Volga in the river-steamer a day later, we had a concert, which lasted intermittently from breakfast to supper-time, in the saloon with its piano. The performers—any odd mechanics or soldiers who happened—sang us at our request old boating-songs and traditional folk-songs. But Madame P. was all for the "Song of Communist Youth" and the "Marching-Song of the Red Cavalry." It was no ruse on her part to impress us with her enthusiasm. Hours later, when I stole back to the saloon after all our party had dispersed, she was keeping the pianist hard at it, a smile of beatific satisfaction on her lips, at the "Song of Communist Youth" and the "Marching-Song of the Red Cavalry."

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One further glimpse of it. M. had happened to relate to her how in the Moscow hotel she had asked a young chambermaid for the bathroom, and how the chambermaid, who was amused at her, had taken her along the corridor with an arm round her waist, and had used the Russian endearment of "Doushenka." Madame Pavlinova admitted that the story was a pretty one, but found occasion to remark also, and quite sharply, that there was nothing extraordinary in it, as under Soviet Government everyone was strictly equal, and there was nothing to prevent a Russian chambermaid addressing a visiting English lady as Doushenka, provided that she liked her well enough to do so.

I cannot be rational or instructive on the subject of the week in the Provinces that followed our flight from Moscow—for the week itself was not rational, and was too amusing to be instructive. I would only once again urge anyone who reads these words to go for himself, whenever he is able, on that charming pilgrimage in that charming country.

We arrived at Nijni-Novgorod at nine o'clock on a fine morning (after the usual all-night journey), and should have been met, according to schedule, by transport to take us over the new

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Russian Ford plant that is the glory of the place. We were not met by transport, and we were not taken over the Ford plant. The boat that was to take us up the Volga was reported to be already signalled at the jetty, and we were told that we had time for breakfast and nothing else. This again was not strictly the case, for what we actually had time for was to wait, sitting on our baggage in the sun outside the station, for an hour and a half before a motor vehicle appeared. No one minded. A white goat was browsing in the cobbled square. A few peasants came round us, attempted to get into conversation, and expressed their willingness to accept cigarettes. Every type of horse-drawn transport passed by. (The horses in Russia are well kept, and are for the most part a pleasure to see. The droshky-horse, alike in Petersburg, in Moscow and in the Provinces, has an air of breeding about him, fine legs, and a muzzle that would go into a wine-glass. The horses are not as well kept as in England, for it is the particular pride of Englishmen to keep their horses as though in training for a fat-stock show. But they are better kept than any horses that I have ever seen in Paris, or Germany, or anywhere else on the Continent.)

We missed the Ford works, and consoled

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ourselves instead with a breakfast at an hotel—oil-cloth table-cloth, eggs, bread and butter, and acorn coffee—and a walk to the water-side through endless hundreds of bearded peasant faces. The Russian authorities have been accused in many quarters of being "Too good" as showmen on this particular Intourist trip. It is implied that they dress a window-front; show trippers the cream of their country; and conceal from them all that they should not see. My own experience is that they do a reasonable best for their clients, but have neither the time nor the opportunity to go to much trouble over window-dressing. The Russian Ford works are genuinely a star-turn both in the way of factory-planning and town-planning. I have talked to doctors and engineers (both English) who have been over them. But our own tour, for the sake of a minor economy in making a boat-connection, was not given time to see over them. In Moscow we had been taken to one or two older factories in preference to some newer ones. In Moscow, also, we had been taken to the Tretiakov Art Gallery—surely one of the most lamentable collections of nineteenth-century painting in the universe—while I was left to discover for myself, when I went back alone to Moscow, the Morosov

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Collection, that has a roomful of Gauguins unequalled by any European Gallery. On all these counts, it seemed that we were being shown a rough cross-section of the country, rather than a carefully selected nosegay of its chief attractions. I recur to this point again, for I find that since I have been back in England this is the point that Englishmen will least easily believe. If the returning tripper explains that he was in the country a month and was allowed to wander with unrestricted freedom where he listed, he is met with the old, old litany, "Ah, but they made you think so! Really you were allowed to see nothing that they did not want you to see."

Of Nijni, owing to the impatience of our steamer to set off up-river, we saw very little. The Ford works lie some miles outside it. The great Fair, that was for centuries the meeting-place of merchants coming from as far as India and China, petered out and was finally suppressed a few years ago. One sees the remnants of its booths and warehouses, and passes by part of the immense trodden Fair-ground. Guides tell us that the new activity in Nijni is that a vast dyke is being built to keep the river away from the town (up till recently half the town was regularly flooded for a part of the year), and that a new

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bridge nearly a mile long is being thrown over the River Oka. (The Oka is a tributary of the Volga, and where they join together comes the town of Nijni-Novgorod.) Of course it may, according to the English authorities, be all part of the "window-dressing"; but there sure enough, visible even to the passing eye, is a vast new embankment rising along the river front, and there also are the piles of the mile-long new bridge.

There were peasants sitting about in the sun near the jetty—extravagant grotesques of types such as one sees in "The General Line" and other films of Russian peasant life—dressed in fur caps and canvas garments, with sacking and straw shoes bound on their feet; farm-women, peasant women, browsing goats and driven cattle. One could spend a long time at the jetty with a sketch-book.

Once on the boat—a light-draught river-steamer with paddle-wheels, carrying cargoes of eggs and apples as well as passengers—the need for our rush through Nijni-Novgorod became less apparent. To be exact, the boat did not move at all for an hour. It then proceeded half-a-mile upstream to the next jetty, still within sight of the town, and tied up there in hot sunlight for the rest of the day. We had meals, played the piano

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in the forward saloon, and lay about sunning ourselves on deck. About eight o'clock in the evening we perceived ourselves again to be moving—but it happened that we were moving backwards downstream to a jetty half-a-mile *below* our first starting-place. More cargo had to be taken aboard. The lights of the town, perched high above the river, were reflected in the water. Far down the river the lights of the Ford works, forbidden country, blinked on the horizon like the lights of another town. We finally pulled out from the jetty and flapped upstream at ten o'clock in the evening—slightly more than twelve hours after we had first set foot in Nijni-Novgorod. . . .

I began to see after this why a celebrated London journalist, who had preceded me by a week on the same tour, had been less than complimentary to some of the arrangements of the tour. He had come from London armed with introductions, and with appointments with important people in Moscow and Leningrad. The fact that at one point or another his tour had drifted twenty-four hours behind schedule had been enough to wreck his whole programme. Luckily for myself, I had no other ambition than to follow the line of least resistance. The

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September day happened to be hot and sunny. I would as soon have been on a river-boat tied up to a jetty as on a river-boat proceeding upstream. The food was eatable. The crowd of peasants on the other decks was absorbing to look at. And the idleness—and the gentle lapping of the broad Volga against the sides of the boat—were an acceptable contrast to the wild hurry of trams, pavements and excursions that had been our life in the cities.

The night on the boat was not the happiest part of the journey in Russia. Previous trippers had told me that the Volga boat was likely to be dirty; and experience showed that they were not far wrong. Cockroaches abounded in the cabins. More sinister animals there may have been, but I do not know. I am personally no test or criterion. During the War I spent a winter in trenches as a Private, and though most other members of the battalion suffered from vermin, I escaped untouched. I made the sign of the Cross in Jeyes' Disinfectant Fluid on the floor of the cabin shared by M. and T.; and owing to this combination of piety and sanitation, they also escaped. But let me pretend to no reader that the Volga boat was as clean as a clinic. Perhaps many Eastern-European river-steamers, that also carry large

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cargoes of peasants, fruit, timber and farm-stuffs, are not much better.

On the second day occurred the concert. In spite of changes of régime, and the distressing report that "no Russian had smiled since the Revolution," music still plays a continual part in Russian national life. The peasant hordes in the stern had no sooner got on the boat than mouth-organs and stringed instruments appeared from among their baggages, and weird crooning songs were wafted to our part of the boat through most of the day and night. Going upstream we passed strings of barges and timber-rafts being towed downstream past us. On most of them could be descried the figure of a man bent over a concertina, and a couple of other figures gesticulating or clog-dancing to its strains. The picture suggested as pleasant and carefree a pageant of river-life as could be found in most other countries.

The chief performer, and for some hours the only performer at our own concert, was a shabbily-dressed young man with spectacles, who crept into the saloon and gave indications that he wished to play the piano. He was a mechanic, going Northward to complete an engineering course. He spoke good German, so we were able to talk. He played by ear, not at all badly, and

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his music seemed a natural and suitable accompaniment to our leisurely progress up the great river. After a couple of hours of his recital, I noticed that two Russian officers who were in the saloon with us were getting more and more restive. I wondered if it were some unwritten breach of discipline that an ill-dressed mechanic should discourse music in the presence of officers of the Red Army. But no! When at last they could contain themselves no longer and went across to protest to him, it was to protest that he was only playing piano-music, and that they wanted him to play music that they could sing songs to. He obliged, and the three of them sang unflaggingly for most of the afternoon, after an interval had been taken for lunch. They sang Military songs (Madame Pavlinova joining in) and Student songs and Folk-songs—including the Song of Stenka Razin, remembered by those who heard the Don Cossack Choir in London. Razin was a sort of seventeenth-century Russian Robin Hood, a bandit and revolutionary, whose province was the Volga. He had a large following, and has remained a popular figure of legend for centuries, but he was ultimately caught, and executed in Moscow. A traditional story is told of his goodness of heart. On one occasion he had captured a

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Princess, and took her to live with him as his queen and his bride. But after a time his band of brigands found that he was falling under her soft sway, and no longer led them to battle with the same enthusiasm or frequency. They protested to him on the matter. And Razin, who never failed to respond if a request were put to him decently, at once threw his Princess into the Volga, and took up his responsibilities again. . . .

Another Russian that I met on the boat was a member of the celebrated G.P.U., the Secret Police—a body that is popularly supposed in England to subject all whom it comes across to torture and extermination. There must be ranks in its hierarchy, for the present member of it seemed an oppressed and down-trodden little individual, with powers of life and death that would not have impressed a cockroach. He looked superficially at our Passports (that he could not read), pointed proudly to his badge of office, and late at night, when I met him walking the deck, took me to the side of the boat to show me that it was the paddle-wheel that was making the boat move along. He seemed as nearly brainless as it is possible for an individual outside an asylum to be. I suspect that his chief duty on the boat was to keep an eye on the crates of apples

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that formed its main cargo. There were hundreds of these crates, loosely-packed; it had been a hot day, and prizing the crates open just far enough to extract an apple or two seemed the crew's chief diversion.

The voyage up the Volga, including the ten hours that we stayed anchored to our first jetty, lasted a night and two days. The last afternoon of it was extraordinarily lovely. The river, there still about eight hundred miles above its entry into the Caspian, was broad and impressive. Cloud-shadows had been chasing each other across its surface all the morning, but later in the evening a gorgeous golden and purple sunset was turned on for our benefit. The panorama of the river-banks was endlessly interesting—low, shelving banks of sand and turf, cattle and horses standing knee-deep in the water, backgrounded by small clumps of fir trees and silver-birches, circular squat haystacks, windmills with six sails, and the silhouettes of a long succession of small villages. In the middle of each village would rise up the cupolas of a white Baroque church—many of them with an exquisite grace of design. Sometimes there would be more than one church. One small village hung high on a steep part of the river-bank had three perfect churches almost

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touching one another. Another village, an even tinier affair with about ten houses in all, had four churches. The evening was so still that, on the boat, we could hear the evening bells ringing from their belfries. The whole country seemed enchanted, dreaming under its sunset to the sound of its bells. A violent political argument set up between some of our party, the little mechanic who had played the piano, and the two officers, on the nature of Communism. The little mechanic, who looked ill and over-worked, explained what his engineering course consisted of. As with most other courses in Russia, it was a mixture of theoretical and practical learning, *combined with teaching*. His day was made up of studying from nine till four—half theoretical work, half practical, and then in the evening, from seven to ten, being required to give classes himself to students in a lower grade. He seemed in no hurry to get to his destination, which was Ivanovo-Vosnessensk, but attached himself to us and put in a couple of days with us on our way there. He spoke no English, but his German turned out useful. I think he made a mystic arrangement with Pavlovina to be fed for the time he was with us, in return for becoming an extra, unofficial guide, and taking some of us off her hands.

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We landed in darkness, on a small, almost deserted jetty, and scrambled up a high bank towards the small town—or village—that lay behind it, Kineshma! The outline of a church presented itself, and a straggling sandy village street. We were taken to an inn. It had a bar-parlour; there was a dormitory, a bare white-washed room upstairs with a few iron beds in it for the women; and another downstairs for the men. It was the low-water mark of the Tour as regards accommodation. We seemed to have arrived at the uttermost ends of the earth. Leningrad (bleak enough on first acquaintance) and Moscow became gay and populous Paradises in retrospect. We had had an evening meal on the boat, and blankness and desolation stretched ahead of us. But we had counted without the indefatigable Madame Pavlinova. . . . She had been on the telephone to a Cinema as soon as we landed. The place possessed a Cinema. We straggled through ill-cobbled and uneven streets to it. A loud-speaker at a street-corner bawled out a political discourse from Moscow. The ten p.m. performance, sparsely attended, was beginning. It was a film about life in Kamchatka. Not allowed to rest content with their daily toil on some infinitesimal portion of the Five Year

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Plan, the inhabitants of this remote village were offered as an evening relaxation a propagandist film—showing how life was being pepped-up and collectivised and made educational among the fish-canneries of Kamchatka, the frozen peninsula, three thousand miles more remote from civilisation than themselves, that sticks out into the Pacific Ocean. . . . I went to bed that night marvelling at the energy of a Government that can open schools to educate even a population that is half Mongol and half Esquimaux, and at the mentality of a race that can work itself up to be excited about it.

In the morning we began touring life in the Provinces. I have a recollection of breakfast, and a church, and a factory. The breakfast—bread-and-butter, tea, and the everlasting eggs made into something that was half a custard and half an omelette—was eaten in the company of peasants in a sort of wooden water-side pavilion. Half the village, and the tramping fraternity from a district as large as a continent, seemed to be assembled there. (The Volga, now as in past centuries, is one of the main highways of Russia.)

After breakfast, a few of us slipped off to the fine church that was near the pavilion. It was Sunday morning, though in a land where no day

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is officially Sunday, this is easily forgotten. We had the luck to come in for a Service in the full tide of its ceremony. Pavlinova had refused to take us there, pooh-poohing the notion that anyone still went to church in Russia. We had wandered there out of curiosity on our own. But what we saw there was worth seeing from several points of view.

In the first place, the ceremony was well attended, and openly attended. In this obscure village, whose only importance is that some factories lie a few miles outside it, there were about a hundred present in the congregation. It was visible evidence that the Soviet Government had not persecuted Religion out of existence. (Anyone might know without going to Russia that it had not. It is clearly written in the law of the land that any twenty people can call themselves a congregation, and occupy premises for open worship. But the number of people who have told me since I have been back in England that "the Bolsheviks have abolished Religion by law" is legion. They have not done so. There is a flood of official propaganda against it—but this is far from being the same thing as persecution. In Leningrad the great St. Isaac Cathedral is made into an anti-Religious Museum. But the other Cathedral in Leningrad, the Kazan

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Cathedral, is permanently open for Services. The Government officially "disapproves" of Religion; but the choice is left to the individual.)

The second matter of interest was to notice that the congregation of a hundred was almost entirely made up of older people. There were not more than a dozen of the younger generation among it.

The third was to wonder why, to the scandal of most other communities, the Soviet Government started its campaign against State Religion—and to find so large a part of the answer in the small village Church itself. The opposition to Religion was to some extent historic. The most casual glance at Russian history proves for how many centuries the Priesthood had been the tool of the Autocracy. From the time of Peter the Great to the time that Rasputin was appointing Bishops indiscriminately merely because he had the Czar's favour, the history of the Russian Church had been the history of subservience and reaction. But the grudge lies deeper than that. In the village of Kineshma there is not a decently paved street, nor a decently built house. Because it has not yet been taken in hand, it stands as a village of the old régime—almost a collection of hovels. And yet its Church, in comparison, is a miracle of art and of expenditure. It was clean and light

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and airy, the only clean and light and airy building in the place. Its officiating Priest—a lovely white-bearded old man like a Tintoretto of the great period—wore a gold cope that swept the ground. Its walls, frescoed as high as the cupola. had their lower expanses covered with silver and gilded ikons, and, standing about its marble floor, were pairs of candle-sticks as high as the priest himself, of heavy silver-gilt. All the wealth of the village for a couple of hundred years—a village that could not afford in that time to build itself a single decent house or lay itself a single decent street—must have gone to making that Church the thing of beauty that it was, and to supporting its priesthood. I am willing to admit the influence and the importance of having any one instance of perfect beauty in any community. But to have carried the thing to this extreme seems to me to be carrying it too far. (And I did not forget that several villages that we had passed on the banks of the Volga, smaller than Kineshma, had had two and three churches each.) Comparing the luxury of that small village church—"luxury" is the only word that describes it—with the surrounding poverty and need, I was slightly amazed at the moderation of non-Religious Bolshevism in leaving it unrifled.

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I have said, I think, that it was *not* pointed out to us as an example of how generous Bolshevism could be to its opponents. Pavlinova had told us we would see nothing in the church worth seeing, and had tried to head us off from going there. The Service, the choral singing, the Tintoretto priest and the magnificent display of Church ornament had all been discoveries of our own.

Pavlinova indeed, far from accompanying us to our Sunday morning devotions, had been busy again with her telephone. We had the whole day to pass in the little hamlet, as the train for Ivanovo-Vosnessensk did not go till the evening. How could it be better employed than in visiting a few more factories, crèches, workmen's dwellings, etc., etc., etc.—the usual set of attractions—that lay a mile or two away in the country, with Kineshma as their centre? The only thing lacking to this scheme was transport to take us there. Pavlinova had seen to it! As we came in sight of our miserable hotel-beerhouse-estaminet, a fleet of six droshkys with champing horses, and bearded drivers in skirted blue overcoats waited our pleasure. Each factory in the neighbourhood had a droshky attached to it for duty. . . . Pavlinova had telephoned for them all. . . ! Ten minutes after leaving the Church-service we were

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skimming across the flat Russian countryside, bound factorywards. Both the horses and the drivers were excited to be in one another's company, proceeding as a cavalcade. I saw it coming before it actually happened . . . they were going to start racing against one another. The Russian country-road was straight enough, but was narrow and had a camber as steep as the top of a railway-carriage. For one droshky to pass another it had to leave the metalled portion of the road, and to drop or rise, usually with two wheels in the air, on to the surrounding footpath. The whip-cracking, the shouting and the galloping hooves resounded through the quiet Sunday-morning fields. I have rarely come across a more nervewracking form of progression, even in a Parisian taxicab. There was nearly an accident on the way to the factory, and there was a minor collision with a farm-cart (that failed to get out of the way quite quick enough) on the way back. But I suppose I was glad to have done it after it was over. How many staid English dramatic critics can say they have been droshky-racing, on a Sunday morning, across the heart of Soviet Russia, along the banks of the Volga . . . ?

The factories, crèches, etc., of the neighbourhood were a less sophisticated edition of the ones

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in the big towns. There were textile-factories that I was taken through and through until the noise deafened me and the dust of the flying cotton-shreds reduced me to a delirium of hay-fever. The operatives were working twelve, sixteen, twenty-four, and in some cases, thirty-two looms each. These figures meant little to me, knowing nothing about textile-work of any kind. But they take on a dim significance when one remembers that the recent dispute in the Lancashire cotton-mills (1931) centred round the operatives' refusal to go up from six looms each to eight. I have no doubt that the English operatives had reason for their refusal. In the existing condition of things, for each man to take on more work means the greater chance of himself or his neighbour being thrown out of a job. England is still in the disastrous stage of producing for profit instead of producing for consumption—and between these two methods a world of new ideals and new organisation must lie. I merely bring it to the attention of English readers that the Russian method, whatever its defects, has already made its operatives willing, and eager, to take on the maximum amount of work of which they are capable. The question of sweating did not come into it. The factory was working a seven-hour

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day, and a five-day week—that is to say, four days of work and then one of rest.

One of the methods by which the factory was speeding-up output seemed to me amusing. It did not involve the torture of the lash, but it might be said to involve a certain amount of the "mental cruelty" of which so much is heard in Court when American cinema-stars are divorcing one another. It was the method of using a small, sinister-looking black hut, the "Chorny Doska"—the "Black Desk"—erected just outside the gates of the factory. To this Black Desk, plastered on its outside with anti-alcoholic posters and moral maxims, all those have to come for their wages who have slacked or idled or got drunk, or in other ways let down the lofty standards of the factory . . . amid the jeers of their colleagues. Poo-Bah in "The Mikado" would not have thought the idea beneath him.

The crèche and kindergarten attached to this factory had their being in a group of houses in a small wood near to it. They had only been open a few months. The impression that they gave was much the same as those in the towns—masses of babies well looked after by women with quiet and intelligent faces, women who seemed to have a job that they liked and to be doing it well.

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There was a special room set apart for the mothers to come from the factory to feed their offspring. We were made to put on white overalls before going through it. The houses in the wood were wooden-built and not new. An English Inspector might have noted that new brick buildings would have been better adapted for the purpose. But compared with what one can imagine a pre-Revolution Russian industrial area was like—or what an English slum-area is like still—the surroundings represented a heaven of cleanliness and sanitation and care. The children arrived at the kindergarten-age seemed on good terms with their teachers. I could not make out if the ceremony of a class-full of them standing up and piping in chorus "Good-morning, Uncle," when one of our party put his head round the door was intended as frivolous or polite.

On the way back, the droshky convoy unfortunately again racing, we were taken over a new workmen's Club House. It was a large, four-storied building, serving several of the surrounding factories. Its chief feature was a theatre holding seven or eight hundred people, where the workmen are encouraged to get up their own plays, and to which the Moscow companies are sent round. It also had reading-rooms, study-rooms

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with desks and black-boards (the Soviet mania for education comes out at every turn), a library and a gymnasium. The day in the insignificant village of Kineshma had turned out as full of incident and edification as had most other days of this diabolically energetic pilgrimage. We caught an evening train for Ivanovo-Vosnessensk.

The three days in Ivanovo-Vosnessensk were the last three days that I had with my companions of the Intourist party, and it was fitting that they should sum up in themselves almost all that we had seen in the previous fortnight.

Ivanovo is a foretaste—a sketch—of what many other Soviet provincial towns in a few years will be. It showed the new slapped down on top of, and contrasting with, the old. The architectural division between them is as clear to the eye as the refusal of drops of oil and water to mingle.

Half of Ivanovo is " old Russian " small-town, pure and simple. It has long, wide streets, each independent of all others and like a village main-street. Most of these streets have no roadway, but a wide, unbroken lawn that separated the two lines of houses from one another. In summer it makes good grass going for traffic—that is to say, an occasional horse-drawn wagon—and in winter its snow covering freezes it hard. But in spring

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and autumn, as in all other Russian villages, it must be an impassable morass. Its houses are single-storied wooden houses, decorated with elaborate fantasies of woodwork, standing back from the grass centre-walk behind wooden gates and palings. Down most of such streets there are avenues of low trees. In any one of these streets one might be in a small primaeval village of a couple of hundred inhabitants.

But Ivanovo also happens to be a large manufacturing town of more than a couple of hundred thousand inhabitants. Textile factories ring it round at a little distance from its centre. It has also to be a nest of warehouses, offices, engineering shops, and the everlasting workmen's Clubs, crèches, theatres, schools and meeting-places, that the Soviet insists on as a workman's first rights.

Hence it is also being laid out as a new town on top of the old. The beautiful width of the old streets is the only thing that is being retained. With their trees and lawns they make the basis of fine modern boulevards. The well-known high skyline of many-storied buildings is rising upon them. The roadways are being laid down not with cobbles but with Macadam—some of the first that I had met with in Russia. I am only guessing—but probably not guessing wildly—when I

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suggest that in some years' time it will become as fine a modern town as could be wished for.

Another sidelight on modern life is provided by a brand-new Soviet-built hotel . . . one of the first efforts of the kind to which they have turned their attention. It has little luxury about it, but it is clean—or would be clean if the inhabitants would let it be—and modern. It has a lift that works (after three weeks' travelling in Muscovy I had long ceased to expect such a thing). It had mirrors in its entrance-hall, and a lady sitting at a desk to take the names of visitors, and a parquet-floored dining-room with an enclosure for an orchestra (music supplied by balalaikas and concertinas—but nevertheless giving a friendly and welcoming air) and a Bar with rows of bottles. . . . There was running water in the rooms, and spacious lavatory accommodation. I said that the place would be clean if the inhabitants would let it be clean. You can take a Russian to the water, but it is not yet always possible to make him wash or pull a lavatory-plug. The fact would be astonishing if it were not also true of a great many other European countries as well. The English or American visitor staying at one of the crack hotels of Budapest—a hotel where the plumbing is up to the standards of the Savoy in London—will not easily

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forget his surprise at finding most of the lavatories in a state as grotesque as if they had been used by savages. The Soviet mania for education is not unneeded.

The Ivanovo stay was enlivened by three incidents: the buying of some Russian embroidered blouses, and two conversations.

The buying of the blouses gave us a better chance of seeing the town in all its ramifications than we had counted on. M. and I had had the idea of buying them, partly as decorative articles, and partly because they might come in useful in England as fancy-dress. We applied to Pavlinova, "Could we go off and get some Russian blouses?" But the matter was not simple. It took a day. The little Russian engineer, still attached to us after the Volga journey, came with us as interpreter. We were first taken to the Town Hall, to get a chit signed by a Trade official allowing us to purchase. The bearded potentate—a replica of Van Gogh's Postman—could with difficulty be got to understand (*a*) that two English people coveted garments that every Russian peasant and artisan wears as a matter of course, (*b*) that we were not dealers, and had not arrived in Russia to buy them in bulk. When my little German-speaking mechanic finally made the

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matter clear to him, he insisted on taking it as an immense joke, and went to the length of placing a private car at our disposal for the search. . . . Courtesy could go no further. We went to one shop, and then to another shop, and then to a third shop. A private car going through the streets attracts Russians as flies are attracted by a fly-paper, and we usually had company with us. But the blouses of the type that we wanted—coloured blouses with coloured embroidery on their cuffs and collars—were not to be had at any of the emporiums. Black ones and white ones there were, but " fancy " were missing. We then tried a factory itself, with no better luck; and here the entire officialdom of the town seemed suddenly to enter into the spirit of the search on our behalf, and to promise us that, as coloured blouses were not there to gratify us, coloured blouses should be *created* for our delight. . . . We were taken by a back-street to a room where work-girls were cutting out garments. We were measured for Russian blouses by a girl who kept a cigarette between her lips as she ran us over with the tape; and coloured blouses were promised " on a Bolshevik's word," to be delivered, embroidered, to us at eleven o'clock that night, as we were departing by train early next morning.

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They arrived at the hotel at eleven o'clock that night—after the good-natured co-operation and tolerance of at least three separate Russian departments.

It may be surmised by some readers that M. and myself had been mistaken for figures of international importance, whose least wish must be gratified by the State; but I prefer to think, with probably greater justification, that Soviet officialdom for once in a way had let itself be caught up in the excitement of the hunt.

A conversation in the Club Room in one of the new Buildings in Ivanovo-Vosnessensk:—It was the custom, after we had seen over blocks of flats and the like, to get a few Russian workmen together for us to ask them questions, and for them to fire off questions at us in return. Pavlinova did her worried best as an interpreter. Workmen and workwomen used to crowd into the room, and there would be thirty or forty of them together. Their speakers were fluent and strong, and even in the medium of a hasty translation they could be seen to keep admirably to the point. A question had been asked by one of them: "What outstanding solution *had* anyone in England so far offered for the chaos into which Capitalism

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seemed to have got itself?" Our Russian conversationalists were whales on economics, and their information on England's problems was at least as good as our own. As no one in our party seemed to have much to say on this point, I offered a second-hand suggestion. I said, with a memory of a "New Statesman" article in my mind, that a certain new line of country *did* seem to be being explored by those who knew more about the matter than I did. It was the Henry Ford theory, on which he had had great success in America. It was the principle of paying his workmen so high that they themselves had the money to buy back his own products. It had been suggested that if many big branches of manufacture could run themselves on these lines, there might be the gleam of a solution for current problems. I was jumped upon for this like lightning. Most of the present company were familiar with the argument already—several of them had read Henry Ford's own autobiography; and they proceeded to point out what, according to them, was its main defect. They said that Ford himself admitted that his system of "standardisation" had an important disadvantage; that a labourer who was given one infinitesimally small task to do and had to repeat it many thousand

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times a day suffered a severe nervous strain; that breakdowns of the individual were frequent; and that the Soviet ideal of change and variety of task for the labourer was a cardinal point.

I do not quote this as being a brilliant or a conclusive discussion. But it struck me as worthy of comment that among a group of workmen in an ordinary workmen's-dwelling basement one should have come across even three or four of them who had gone to the trouble of reading Ford's autobiography; and that they should then, either by intelligence or by economic training, have immediately been able to put a finger on its admittedly weak spot. No doubt they had got their dialectic training in badgering many a previous party of foreign tourists. But it was I who had brought Ford into the discussion, and their replies on this one point were the less likely to be part of their usual stock-in-trade.

Another conversation, in the restaurant of the Ivanovo Hotel:—A dark-haired young man, rather fine looking, and wearing a spotlessly white Russian blouse, had heard English being spoken and had come over to our table. He has been one of the "shock-brigade" workers who, as a reward for meritorious service, had been given a much-advertised

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trip to London and other European cities earlier in the year. (The English Press had made a great fuss about them, mostly in ridicule.) Here was fun! To get from a good Russian, and an exemplary Communist at that, what he had really thought about London and the Capitalist civilisation of the West.

He had much to say, and said it with animation and a sense of humour. He had been shown over London, I regretted to note, by an artist in propaganda from the Soviet point of view. He had conceived a great admiration for three of our institutions—for the cleanliness of our streets in the West End, for the way our Museums were kept, and for our Underground Railway. This had seemed to him wholly admirable. But the boat that his party had been on had docked near Tower Bridge, and his acquaintance with our slums was by no means superficial. (He remarked in passing that Hamburg was a much finer city than London, even at the points on which London most prided itself, and that "it was only our patriotism that made us deny it.")

He had then been taken to see Karl Marx's neglected grave in Highgate Cemetery, and immediately after had been taken to see a marble monument that one of our Royalties had caused to be erected in memory of a pet poodle. . . . (It

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was here that I respected the artistry of whoever had planned his tour.) He had then been taken to see the changing of the Guard in Whitehall, which he said reminded him of a military musical-comedy; and with his foreign effrontery he added that he could not believe that we, as a grown-up nation, took this sort of thing seriously. And he had then been taken, as an exhibition of the musical and dramatic taste of our Metropolis, to see Chevalier in "The Smiling Lieutenant," whereat his disgust and boredom had exceeded all limits. Here my pride as an Englishman came to the rescue of our stricken party, and I hastened to inform him that the film in question had been made by a Frenchman in Hollywood. . . . Upon which we became amicable again, and together drank some tea.

This was my last communal meal with the original Intourist party in whose company I had started from London. I reminded myself with difficulty that it was hardly three weeks ago that we had left London Bridge. Worlds, lifetimes and eternities seemed to have intervened. One had seen a new race and a new civilisation. They were to leave early in the morning for St. Petersburg and the homeward boat. I was exercising my option of staying on, and was leaving an hour later again for Moscow.

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CHAPTER VII

MOSCOW AGAIN

THE remainder of my stay in Russia was as different from the early weeks as chalk from cheese. And the contrast was welcome and instructive.

By following up to then the schedule of the Intourist authorities and their guides, I had crammed as much as was humanly possible into three crowded weeks. But it had been done at the price of continuous journeyings, expeditions, excursions, and hardly ever having as much leisure as was necessary for writing a postcard. It was an introduction to an immeasurably wide expanse of ground, and had had often enough to be quick and superficial.

Going back to Moscow alone, I went back to a week of conversation and leisure, and to " checking up " the impression of all that I had seen quickly, in the light of the far greater experience of Englishmen and Americans who had lived and worked in Russia for many years.

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I went back to Moscow as to a " known " city, and stayed at another hotel, the " Staro Vavarinskaia "—an improvement on our first one—where my meal-tickets were interchangeable with any other hotel in Moscow. It meant that I could rise when I liked, and feed abroad as often as I wanted to. Luck—and the good-nature of friends—gave me continual opportunity of meeting people. A young English girl whom I had known in London had already been ensconced in Moscow for some time and seemed to know half the American colony. She took me to Maurice Hindus, Russian born and American trained, whose two books, " Red Bread " and " Humanity Uprooted," have probably done more than any others to give Western civilisation an intelligent view of Soviet life. I went to theatres, and met American engineers and Russian theatre-directors. I met American travellers who had come into Russia by way of the Trans-Siberian Railway, for Moscow is full of American trippers whose native curiosity and adventurousness have drawn them to have a look for themselves at what is happening in this new and extraordinary country. I had the luck to track down Alexander Wicksteed, an Englishman who for the last eight years has taught English in the University of Moscow.

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I fell in with a former companion of my dramatic-critical days, R. D. Charques, who had been on the staff of "The Times," and who took me to relatives of his who were working for the Russian Government. I went to a Circus, where two thousand slaves of Communism were roaring with laughter at clowns falling off bicycles; and was there introduced to a very young *ballerina* in the making—a tiny girl of eleven, who was attached to the (once Imperial) School of Ballet, and who explained to me gravely in French her ambitions. I met a Russian Editor in his office; and a Russian architect who walked across Moscow with me—and whose quiet, cultured voice explaining that "*some* of the things that the Soviet had done had been admirable, and that some of the things would be seen to be good in the end" was more impressive in its moderation than a great deal of wilder and more propagandist praise. And I was taken by Hindus to meet Lyons and to meet Louis Fischer, two American journalists who had been Correspondents in Moscow for the last ten years—since 1921.

I mention these encounters, some of them with people august in their own line of business, and some of them with people not august in any line of business, because they gave me a sense, hitherto

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absent from the tour, and all the more valuable because of it, of meeting and mixing with a variety of people who had, for years on end, lived and worked and had their being under the Soviet Government. It was a surprise, to an inexperienced Englishman, to find how normal and unastonishing and settled and conversational (especially conversational) their every-day lives could be. Human nature forms fantastic pictures of all sides of life except those that it has personally experienced. A photograph, an anecdote, a fragment of gossip—and one's mind is set working, and is usually set working wrong. One's pre-imagination of trenches in war-time was of shouting and shells bursting. One's actual experience, at least for some weeks on end, might be of quietness and the sizzling of bacon. . . .

Even so with life in Soviet Moscow. As a reader, though a sceptical one, of newspapers for the last few years, I had formed *some* picture of the daily round, the common toil of all who lived within the Soviet Union. It was not quite an incredible picture—less incredible than most of those newspapers had tried to make out. But it had still contained elements of shock and of terror in it. And it did *not* contain such homely features as little girls of eleven who were learning

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French and studying to be *ballerinas*; and Editors who worked at their desks above noisy printing-machines (just like Editors work in London), and a mob crowding together to enjoy trapeze-acts in Circuses (just like mobs crowd together to enjoy trapeze-acts in Circuses all the world over). And most especially it did not contain responsible and impartial American Correspondents (who had lived for ten years under the system), who not only assumed that the Soviet system was a permanent and stable system, but seriously suggested that in future it might be giving lessons to other and older-established civilisations. . . .

It was these contacts with Fischer and Lyons and Wicksteed and Hindus that gave whatever authority it has to my own impression of modern Russia. All four of them speak and read Russian. Their combined knowledge of the subject was encyclopædic. If I asked about Russian law-courts, a dozen recent cases and decisions were quoted me. If I asked about marriage, family life and education, I could be told the truth by men (and their wives) whose whole circle of acquaintance lay among Soviet Russian families. If foreign policy—Fischer had had access to Government archives for writing his standard English work on post-War Russian diplomacy.

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Without these I might have been willing to admit, to an extent, that the early part of my visit to Russia had been fraudulent and faked by the authorities. It was possible—though unlikely—that the Soviet authorities had gone to the length of "packing" every tram we had boarded and train that we had travelled in with staunch Bolshevists (disguised as workpeople) who would convey to us the pure milk of the Soviet word. It was conceivable—barely—that every factory we had been in, in the middle of busy mornings, had been organised for our reception; that the music we had heard on Volga boats—and also on Volga barges and Volga timber-rafts—had been ordered and paid for, to fill us with a fictitious idea of the light-heartedness of Russians; and that the politeness, friendliness and interest with which we had been received everywhere was in reality a mask assumed at the bidding of Moscow. It is just believable—and there are certainly many people in England who will continue to believe it. But how much less does it become likely when I found that my own quick three-week impressions were confirmed rather than confounded by observers who had made their home in Russia for years. If every time I opened my mouth I had been told—as people

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with superior knowledge have a temptation to tell one—" that all I had seen had been superficial, but that with more experience I would learn differently . . . etc., etc.," then it would have been logical to assume that what one had seen had been merely a window-dressing, and that one had no right to claim any experience at all. But this did not happen. My own knowledge was deepened and elaborated at every point by evenings of talk with Hindus and Fischer. But of denial and contradiction there was little. And I found the consensus of opinion was that the Soviet Government, by virtue of the good that it is doing, had come to stay. . . . It is perhaps significant that no other alternative even entered into the discussions.

A great part of my last days in Moscow was devoted to my personal pleasure, and I will pass over it quickly.

I had a fine room high up in my hotel commanding a view of the myriad spires of the Kremlin—and then was turned out of it because other people wanted it, and was put into a back room with two Germans and no view at all. (But as I was only paying £1 a day, room, meals, tips, service and everything else thrown in, I did

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not feel in a position to complain.) I often breakfasted with Hindus at the Metropole. He had a large room to himself, with a private bathroom attached—a rarity in Russia—and this room, with the use of its bathroom as a preliminary, seemed the daily meeting-place of half the English and American colony in Moscow.

I will give a few short notes of my last week, which may or may not be relevant.

A walk across Moscow in the sunlight with a quiet-voiced professional man, the Russian architect. He had heard me asking the way in my three words of Russian, and he had come up and offered, in English, to direct me. His views impressed me because they were moderate views. He spoke of the fact that everyone in Russia has work, that there is no unemployment. (This can be known to be a fact, not because Russians say it is a fact, but because their whole legislation has to take into consideration that it *is* a fact. I was given an instance of it by Hindus. A young man had been hauled up in a court of law for stealing a pair of shoes from a girl. He pleaded that he was hungry, and had no work, and had sold the shoes for food. Instantly the whole attention of the Court switched away from the theft of the shoes, and on to the question of "*Why* he had no work?"

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Records were examined, and it was proved that he had left a job, voluntarily. It was proved that he had fixed up another job for himself, that the job was waiting for him, and that he had failed to go to it. With this important preliminary over, the Court was then free to ask him what he meant by pinching the pair of shoes . . . !)

The architect went on to speak of the hope of getting better and better conditions. "Every year it changes and grows better." Wages were small—but they were getting decent conditions of life. I asked, wasn't it a very slow process? He said, "Yes, but think of the incredibly had bureaucratic tradition that we inherit from the old régime! You must give us time—give us time." The conversation was an echo of many that I had heard before in Russia. They had said to me in trains, when I had said that I was a journalist working for a London paper, "Tell them the truth. Tell them only the truth of what you have seen with us." They were aware that most of the stuff that got into our newspapers on the subject is abominable nonsense. And always they would add, "And come and see us again in one year, in two years, or in three or four years." This resolute and unequivocal belief that progress is being made, and that the

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very surface of the country is changing from month to month, from year to year, is widespread. Exactly how true it is could only be told in long volumes. But that the burning faith is there is in no possible doubt.

The same man mentioned to me one of the biggest flaws in the system: the strict subservience that the State exacts from its chosen instruments, the Communists themselves. A young engineer had just completed a course with great brilliance, and expected a job in Moscow, where he would have been free to study for the highest ranks of his profession. But a camp needed building in the far-off swamps of Siberia, and when detailed to go there he had, as a good Communist, to throw up all his prospects and go. Ideally, he should have been able to point out that it was waste to send him there. Practically, the State had decided that the camp must be built. The State, in organising the collective life of 150,000,000 people, makes hard demands on such an individual. It begins with its own supporters.

Slowness is an hereditary characteristic of Russians. It has been noted before. I noted it afresh every time I waited a quarter-of-an-hour

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before my (quite unoccupied) waiter came to my table in the hotel, or when I waited half-an-hour to get my typewriter out of a cloakroom. What has not been noted so often, is the extreme delight of all Russians in speed, so long as it is perfectly useless speed. They drive their motor-cars about Moscow streets at a prodigious pace—and I had not forgotten the useless, but decorative, droshky-racing on the Sunday morning. . . .

I went to see one of the Department-Managers of the paper "Izvestia." A sort of freemasonry of Journalism existed between us, and he found time for some talk. The paper is printed both in Moscow and in Leningrad. The Moscow editorials used to be sent by wire to Leningrad, and then set up in type again there. Now the newer method has been adopted of sending the stereo-plates bodily by aeroplane. I asked him whether Russian workmen were allowed or encouraged to save and bank wages, where they had enough over to permit this. He said—though I had never actually envisaged a modern Russian with a bank-balance—that of course they were allowed to do this. They had to bank with a State Bank, and the high rate of 8 % interest was given them. Some of them, mostly in the mechanical trades,

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had as much as 1,000 or 2,000 roubles (roughly £150) to their credit. The problem arises: if this goes on, in a certain number of years these savers will be to a minor extent capitalists, and possibly able to exist on their interest. The question is not an immediate one, and will probably be settled before it becomes urgent. The only immediate facts that arise from it are that the Government now sharply graduates wages, giving skilled workers far more than unskilled ones; that it has no objection to saving and banking; and that it rewards it with extremely high interest.

I went to a theatre with Hindus, and to the Opera with a Communist theatre-official, Lydarsky, and to a Circus with a ravishing American girl, whose leopard-skin coat was one of the few things that still had power to attract attention in the swarming and heterogeneous streets of Moscow. Each entertainment was in its way instructive to an outsider. They were alike only in that they all were full. The Opera was again crammed to its doors—and the exhibit was the eighty-year-old "Russlan and Ludmilla" of Glinka. I have a recollection of a rather distraught evening, Lydarsky and I trying to explain the plots of plays to one another. His English was at the stage when it was an agony for him to

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speak it, and for his hearer to listen to it. He managed to explain that he had a great admiration for English dramatic art, in particular for Shakespeare, and in particular for "Hamlet"—between whose character and his own he had long detected a peculiar resemblance. I understood him. It is a trite remark that "art transcends frontiers," but it is a true one. Many Russians might have founded themselves on "Hamlet," just as many English country-houses known to me—and not those of the advanced or sophisticated sort either—might have founded themselves on Chekhov. Can it be that Shakespeare was the first great Russian dramatist, and that Chekhov is the last great English one?

The opera, being old, had been re-dressed, and re-dressed badly. There was neither rhyme, reason, colour-scheme, nor concerted design in the new setting; it was neither classic nor modern, only costly and garish. The old grace that rose to such heights of beauty in the best of the Diaghilef period seems to have departed. The Soviet has created a formula for everything except art. Though there is an exception: the best of the Soviet films are masterpieces.

The comedy that I went to with Hindus was again disappointing. It was a four-year-old play

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called "Our Youth." It had drawn a packed house though it is often in the repertory, and was only being played by Stanislavsky's second, or student, company. The reason for its popularity was its propagandist and revolutionary sympathy. It dealt with the exploits of a group of Communist youth against the White Armies of 1922. Dramatically the play was long and dull—if you ask me how I know this without understanding the language, I reply that I have been for ten years a dramatic critic, and that good acting and Hindus' commentary were quite sufficient for me to pick up the salient points. But the audience applauded frantically all revolutionary sentiments. They also did a thing that is very rare for any audience to do. A long kiss was given on the stage, and they remained silent through it, without a giggle. This is an acid test of the interest and absorption of a whole audience. Few audiences in England pass it.

The Circus was as amusing as are Circuses everywhere. I and the American girl set out to find it one night, and only arrived at it after great expenditure of shoe leather. We walked and we took trams, then we walked again and were misdirected. Then we arrived at the wrong theatre, where a rehearsal for a "political revue" was in progress,

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and only after much parley were refused admission to what would surely have been an interesting side-light on contemporary Russian drama. When we finally found the Circus the programme was half over, and we only got the last two seats in the house at 10*s*. each. The house held two thousand, and like all other places of entertainment in Russia was crowded. The Circus was conducted with the ritual common to all Circuses, trapeze-artists, clowns, trick-cyclists, acrobats, and a lion-taming act. There was a first-rate tramp Bicyclist in the tradition of our own Joe Jackson, much appreciated by the many children who were there. It was noticeable that once in the evening the Clowns broke off in the middle of their turn and delivered a much-applauded patriotic oration. . . .

I asked about this "propagandist" absorption of the Russian theatre many times of my travelling companions in trains. As they were ordinary mechanics, engineers, artisans, and not people of the theatre, I thought that I would like to get their point of view about it. At every entertainment that I had been to—the opera "The Red Poppy," the play "Our Youth," the Circus and the films, the Communist ideal and the accomplishment of the Five-Year Plan had been

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dragged in somewhere, and had usually been the predominant note. I found my companions in trains invariably willing to talk. On long all-day or all-night journeys one of them, seeing that I was a foreigner, would come up and try me with a little German or a little French. His companions would then set him at my throat as an interpreter. Other Russians would crowd in from neighbouring compartments. And discussions—once lasting nearly all night—would invariably ensue. Their thirst for knowledge about England was insatiable, and their thirst for knowledge of what a travelling Englishman thought of *them* was as great.

On the matter of the theatre being given over to propaganda, I asked them this, saying, " You are working your hearts out on the Five-Year Plan by day. How is it that you tolerate your Government thrusting Five-Year Plan propaganda down your throats when you go to the theatre in the evening to forget it ? " The answers that I got were unexpected. I found that I had the *whole* of the railway-carriage against me. Some said that art must reflect the national life of the moment. Some said—the hotheads !—that art was meant only for purposes of propaganda. The more moderate seemed to agree that the idea of " art for art's sake " was an old and out-moded

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and "bourgeois" conception. . . . I tried another tack. I said, "Yes, that's all very well. But art that is only propaganda usually turns out not very good art, and not very good propaganda." They then instanced Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's films—which happen to be both magnificent art and magnificent propaganda. I used to feel about this time that the discussion was not going too well for me, and I once hit on an argument that I thought would be crushing. I said, "All right! I give you the films! But what about music? Can you imagine such a thing as propagandist music? Can you imagine commissioning a composer to compose you a symphony, or write you an opera, on the subject of the Five-Year Plan!" An old man in the corner of the carriage thought this over for some time and then came out with the following retort, that I give word for word as it was spoken. He said, "Young man, it is evident that you do not clearly enough understand what is happening in Russia at the moment. If two young lovers are talking together in Russia at the moment—they are talking of the Five-Year Plan. . . .!"

These conversations, that were spontaneous and therefore genuine, seemed to me to help one "to understand what is happening in Russia" from

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a new point of view and with a new clarity. The Russian Government is not thrusting more propaganda down the throat of its public than that public wishes to swallow. It likes propaganda and is heartened by it. It regards itself, with some justification, as being in the middle of a war—a war for reorganisation and production and efficiency; and it has been the custom of all armies since the dawn of history to seek the comfort of bands and banners.

Is there militarist feeling in Russia? With national aims and ideals set forth so freely on the screen and in the theatre, it is easy to see which way the current of thought is flowing. The answer is that there is both militarist feeling and un-militarist feeling, clearly defined. There is unceasing propaganda against wars of aggression. In almost every film, dragged in whether à propos the story or not, there are sudden visions of old battle-fields, a heap of skeletons and skulls disinterred, a line of sodden trenches under shell-fire—something that is there to say more clearly than words, "Never again. Never again!" The teaching and the belief throughout the land is that wars have always been made by capitalists for the benefit of capitalists. And in

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this sense Russia is growing up to be a pacifist nation.

At the same time there is a dread of Capitalist intervention in their own affairs that finds expression in a host of posters and slogans, a popular army, and an ardent defensive patriotism. I did not get the impression that aggressiveness comes into it. Even in Soviet propaganda and pamphlets the prodigious size of Russia is dwelt on. It is pointed out that there is practically nothing that grows on the earth's surface that Russia cannot grow. (An exception is admitted in the case of one thing only, of chocolate. And it is pointed out that " as Bolshevism likes chocolate " Russia will always be dependent on the outside world for its supplies of this.) But from a volatile people, whose national ambitions are thrust down the throat of a visitor from the moment he enters the country to the moment he leaves it, I heard no single word and saw no single sign that aggressive warfare is looked upon with anything but hate and horror. But the question of national defence is a different matter.

The Russians have not yet forgotten, as most of the rest of us seem to have forgotten, that after our own war was ended, six armies of six different nations over-ran their country, under pretence

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of re-establishing the old régime. Four years after the European war was ended, up till 1922, Russia was still in the throes of defending itself from invasion. An English army, a Polish army, a Czecho-Slovakian army, an American army, and armies and Generals from France and Japan had passed across their land. English money and English supplies had gone to Denikins and Wrangels and Kolchaks and Judenichs. All the nations of the world seemed trying their luck against the Kremlin. And at one time three-quarters of the Empire, most of Siberia, the Ukraine, Archangel and even the suburbs of the capital, were penetrated by invaders. Russia has not forgotten this. It is a quite serious belief of many Russians that some such combination as this could occur again. It is asked, why are the two border countries, Poland and Roumania (admittedly poor countries) arming so heavily, and being given money, material and Military Missions by France? The budgets of the two countries, and their expenditure on armament, have been widely advertised by the Soviet Government. It is a fact accepted by many non-Russian authorities that, at the trial of the ten engineers in Moscow last year on the charge of trying to sabotage the Five-Year Plan, the

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complicity of the French and Polish General Staffs was proved. Here is something more than "propaganda"! Here is an attempt to strike at the very heart of their hope.

All these fears may be without foundation. But that they are fears widely felt and believed in as realities, I can guarantee. I was asked many times by Russians, "What has England got against us? Why is England one of the capitalist countries that would gladly start a new invasion?" I would answer that the majority of English people no more wanted or contemplated a war against Russia than they wanted or contemplated a war against Brazil. I reminded them that the first purely political (and non-economic) strike undertaken in England had been when in 1919 our own transport-workers refused to handle any more arms or munitions being sent against Russia, and thus brought Mr. Churchill's Archangel campaign to an end. But they remained unconvinced; and in view of much of the irresponsible nonsense that has appeared in the last few years in the Press, who shall say that they were altogether wrong?

I came back to England a little more than a year ago after travelling the whole length of the Eastern-European border, from Riga in the north

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through Poland to the Balkans and Constantinople in the south. The impression that I got, and recorded at the time, was that most of the countries of Eastern Europe, with the honourable exception of Austria, were conducting themselves like an armed camp or a military musical-comedy. At the time—I had not then been to Russia—it seemed to me that Europe was merely senselessly arming itself against itself. But I now appreciate the point of view of a Russian more clearly. To his mind—wrong or right as he may be—Capitalism links all other countries together in one camp, with Soviet Socialism in the other. To his mind, Capitalism, which is going through so lean a period, would not be imposing so large a burden of armament-bills upon itself, unless it were with an eye to the Soviet State. To most of us, or at least to many of us in Western Europe, this point of view must seem a mere nightmare of alarm and panic. But, to a Russian, the memory of those six invading armies takes some talking down. It seems to me that England might make it clearer than it does that we have no thought of invading aggression in our minds. English people who have been to Russia will understand me here. Why should all " propaganda "—especially when it is on the

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side of good sense—be left to other countries than ours? (Incidentally, I gained the impression—right or wrong again as it may be—that any country invading Russia would have a thin time. The efficiency of the Red Army I have no means of knowing. But it seemed to me that any foreign army crossing the border might find itself up against every man and woman and child and cat and dog in the country. I believe that, good or less good as the Revolution has so far been, an invading army trying to overthrow it would now find itself opposed by the patriotism of an entire race.)

A curious point raised by the American newspaper Correspondents one evening when we were discussing judgments given in the People's Courts of Justice:—the matter of Alimony paid by a father for a child alleged to be his own. It frequently comes before such Courts that a girl sues a young man, saying that he has been her lover and that therefore he is liable to contribute, for eighteen years by Soviet law, to the support and education of their offspring. A frequent defence for the young man in such a case is to say that he is not the only man that has been the girl's lover, and that the financial responsibility

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cannot therefore rest on him alone. Soviet law has one remarkable elasticity in dealing with this. If other young men can be found who admit to having been the girl's lover, then the blame is divided among them, and they pay a proportionate share in the child's upbringing. *But if only one such young man can be found and traced . . .* then, by Soviet law, he is decreed to be the responsible father—he is *made*, at law, the actual and responsible father, even if he can prove that it is in the highest degree unlikely that the child is his.

From the point of view of the young man in question this may be said to be bad luck. And yet, from another point of view, Soviet law has rough justice on its side. It is argued that the young man, though actually not perhaps that father, had at least, in making love to the girl, *run the risk* of becoming the father . . . ! Soviet law, both for financial and educational reasons, thinks that it is better for the child to have a legal father than to have no father at all. And so the one young man that can be found has to assume full parental responsibilities.

It seemed to me that such a law tended, as the saying goes, to " make young men think a bit." I was told that the law was expressly framed to

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make young men think a bit. License, "free love" and the rest of it, are no more approved of by Soviet law than in the code of Bedford Park. Bolshevik morals are not necessarily the conventional morals of the rest of Western Europe. But physical promiscuousness is no part of them.

Beggars exist in the streets of Moscow. There are not a great number of them. They are fewer than the kerbstone match-sellers in London. But they enjoy a tolerated—or perhaps merely winked-at—existence. Whether their position is an altogether official one and they have their own Soviet and other political privileges I do not know. What did interest me was to see that money is continually being given them. There were a couple of wonderful types who used to stand in the Nikolskaya Ulitza, bearded like Apostles and with wrinkled weather-beaten faces like russet apples. A stream of small coin flowed into their hands from the passers by. No doubt in most cases the coin was of the very smallest. But it struck me as indicating a nation that is not at its last gasp of poverty, when most pedestrians in a crowded quarter of the city had a half-penny or two to give to wicked-looking old men merely because they had nice beards.

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I met yet another American engineer while waiting at the Travel Bureau to get my homeward ticket. He had been two years in charge of a motor-building works, was staying on, and wanted to get his brother over from America to join him. His opinion of the work that was being done :— " Some of my people are very slow and unskilled at the moment. Motor-mechanics is a question of long technical experience, and you can't make a good mechanic out of a peasant in six months. But there is another side to the question. I have been getting lately new batches of young mechanics—peasants' and artisans' sons who have done a four-year technical course. These boys are as fine mechanics as I have met with anywhere in the world, America not excepted. They are keen, thorough, and quick. I am used to working myself on quick American methods, and because I have been brought up in the business all my life can often jump over a stage or two by instinct. But these boys are getting as quick as I am, and in addition they are thorough. They follow me up like lynxes, step by step, and insist on getting to the root of the matter. . . . They are doing other things here in Russia too. They have recently started making their own motor-tyres, They still have to import the raw rubber in bulk,

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but the tyres that they make out of it are better than the German ones; they are as good as any tyres in Europe. Now they have started planting their own rubber down in Turkestan. . . ."

Many Englishmen, myself included, harboured a vague generalisation about the "Russian temperament"—that there was something inherently impossible about a Russian becoming a good mechanic. It was interesting to hear from an American who had had two years intensive experience that he considered it no more than a matter of time-lag in training. One more illusion has to go. A century ago, most Englishmen would have considered themselves capable of dealing with nothing but horses.

Yet another illusion has to go (in Moscow they go fast): the English illusion of the rigidity of Police surveillance and censorship. I called on a young English girl at the Europe Hotel, an Intourist visitor like myself. She was in the hotel, and had been at the hotel for two days; but the hotel register had not yet got her on its books, and the Staff in the hotel bureau flatly denied her existence. . . . Where is the eagle eye with which the authorities are supposed to keep unceasingly on their foreign visitors? Another

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instance:—The Warsaw company of Russian actors recently acted a play in London, "The White Guard." It was sympathetic to the White (anti-Soviet) Armies, and had been forbidden and banished from the stage in Moscow. But it had only been forbidden after it had run *in Moscow* for over three hundred performances. . . . Which fact alone suggests that the Censorship is less rigorous than is popularly supposed.

I left Moscow with as keen regrets as I had ever left any European city—Paris which is the home of friends, or Constantinople which is the home of wonders.

One enters on the Russian pilgrimage with misgiving. (One's friends have seen to that!) The first sight of the country makes one think that one's friends have not exaggerated. Over and over again in the first weeks in Russia the mind is brought up against some panorama of squalor or dinginess or overcrowding—the grey Leningrad mob swarming back from work beneath a low grey sky, a grey unswept cobbled street with bits of paper blowing about it and a man dead drunk in the gutter, the tall grey peeling façades of Leningrad houses, or a tram packed with struggling humanity to the utmost limit of humanity's

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power to endure compression—and one feels, "This is the end. In this land, perhaps through no fault of its own, ease, luxury, gaiety and the whole aesthetic grace of life have been abolished. The place has been turned into a barracks—and a barracks is always the ugliest building in the world." One feels that one would have preferred the sight of a reception at the Winter Palace under the Czar, even though the old régime was founded on the life-blood of a hundred and forty million slaves.

Then—with more experience—the feeling begins to pass. One sees that the new endeavour is not an intensification of dinginess, but a war on dinginess. The war happens to have chosen schools, hospitals, slums, kindergartens and factories as its first battle-grounds, and little has yet been done to cheer the eye in such open streets as the Nevsky Prospect. A fine façade begins to seem of little consequence as long as it shelters a slum behind it; and where slums have been pulled down one begins to see that fine façades can be put up later. What in one's first worst moments has looked like a world of dreariness begins to look in a little time remarkably like a world of hope.

There are aspects of life in Moscow that are

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alluring and seductive. At least to me. I am by nature idle, careless of appearances, bohemian and talkative. In Moscow one meets what to many a good Englishman of the conventional world must appear, in the Nietzschean phrase, a Transvaluation of All Values. Certainly a Transvaluation of Many Values. The valuation of material luxury has gone—and leaves a less oppressive void than might have been imagined. I spent a whole day's talk with a certain American journalist and his family. By a combination of luck and manœuvring he happened to occupy a beautiful (and beautifully furnished) house that had once been a Legation. I spent a long evening in talk with another journalist who was living with his wife in a two-roomed flat at the top of a house—in what in London would have been called a couple of attics. In both cases the procedure was exactly the same. Friends dropped in. Tea in glasses, and cakes, and jam also in small glasses, were served from time to time. The flow of conversation was intelligent and inexhaustible. But I do not know that the host's feelings or the guests' feelings or my own feelings varied importantly, or took cognisance of the difference between an entertainment in a garret and an entertainment in a small palace.

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There is a question which, if honestly answered, must sum up all one's more intimate and subtle impressions of Russia: "Could I bear to go and live there, under existing conditions and under Soviet rule?" Answering honestly, I would like to go out of England and live in *no* country on the earth's surface where friends could not be transported with me. There can be small joy in breaking the contacts of a lifetime. If I had to remove, I would prefer to remove to Paris, which is a seven-hour journey and a Three Pound fare from London.

But if Paris were ruled out I would sooner go to Moscow than to any other European capital. There is more to see there. There is more life and experiment and expectation. There is change and advancement, as opposed to stagnation. If, for the purpose of making the argument a fair one, it can be imagined that I were given the offer of going to Moscow—and it also were arranged that a fair proportion of the people that I have liked best in life and art and literature and sport could come with me—then I see no reason why we should not all be happy together in this new and erratic Jerusalem. Miss Edith Evans would attract a large public to herself at the Stanislavsky Theatre; and Capt. S—— D—— and I,

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continuing a companionship founded on sport, could occasionally go together and shoot a bear in the Caucasus. . . .

A final twelve-hour journey by train from Moscow to Leningrad—and a boat waiting at the dock to start for England.

It was as usual an all-night journey, and no one seemed inclined for sleep. We got out from time to time at small stations and had tea at buffets. I was the only Englishman on the train, and two sets of Russians made it their business to entertain me. One of the groups could talk German and the other could talk a little French. Having only a few more hours on Russian soil, I began to get reckless and thought that I would ask them a few leading questions. The two groups were in two different compartments of the corridor train, and each invited me at different times to share drinks and provisions brought in paper bags and baskets. I asked each of the groups in turn the question, "Are you happy?" —and on each occasion was greeted with a genuine roar of laughter, and the affirmation that they were. (It occurred to me that if I had asked the same question in an English railway-carriage at any time during the last few years of MacDonald

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or Baldwin Governments, I might or might not have been greeted with the reply that the Government was doing its best, and that there was nothing to complain of—but I would hardly have been treated as though my question were altogether too absurd to need asking. . . .)

I said, "All right! I suppose by that laughter you mean to imply that you are happy. *Why* are you happy? We in England think you all miserable slaves, and I would like to know some concrete and convincing reason why you don't think that you are miserable slaves."

In both cases I got the following answer. I do not say it was a correct or full answer. There may be qualifications that need to be made and were not made. But I say at least that it was an answer deeply believed in, and that it expresses a faith that, right or wrong, is the mainspring of much action in the Russia of to-day. The answer was this: "We are happy in the first place because there is no unemployment in the length and breadth of Russia. How many unemployed have you got in England? Three million? In Germany? Is it four or five million? In America? Is it not more millions than that?" (They had these figures at their fingertips, doubtless dinned into them as propaganda;

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but their statement of their own freedom from unemployment is strictly correct.) They went on, "In the second place, we *own* the country. Bad as it is at present, it is our own property and we have a share in it. Though many of us are working hard, and working for small wages, at least we are working for ourselves. What we put into our work comes back to us, or will in future come back to us. There is no one *exploiting* us. There are no Boards of Directors who draw £5,000 a year salaries from the profits of the trade. There are no coal Royalty-owners, getting large incomes from an industry in which they perhaps do nothing at all. Stalin himself runs the country for a salary just more than that of a school-teacher. . . ."

I repeat that the force of this argument is not that it is wholly, or even essentially, true. It may or may not be. I would have needed to be in Russia longer than I was to know this. But it is an argument that draws force and becomes seriously to be reckoned with—because it is widely believed in. In the faith of it, millions of toiling people in Russia are drawing in their belts and are giving their best endeavours. In the faith of it, "shock brigades" are being organised by the workers among the workers themselves.

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In the faith of it, operatives in mills are working thirty-two looms each as soon as they have the skill (while in Lancashire we continue to work six); and in the faith of it, parties march out on to the roads on their fifth day of rest to do voluntary, unpaid work, to the accompaniment of bands and banners. The history of Russia in the next few years will prove how far the faith is justified or unfounded. But that the faith itself exists widely, there is no possible doubt.

I was allowed to get to sleep in the train at three o'clock that night. The discussion had lasted till then. In the morning I noticed that my companions of the night before, a few compartments away from me, were whiling away the rest of the journey into Leningrad by singing part-songs. They seemed as fresh as paint, when I paid a visit to them, though I for my own part was feeling drowsy. I asked one of the girls in the party what they were professionally, as they all seemed so pleased with themselves, and I was anxious to know what particular favoured status or profession brought such happiness in Russia. She replied airily, "Oh we're all 'intelligentsia'"! . . . She meant, no doubt, that they belonged to the clerk, "professional" or brain-working classes. I had always understood that

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the clerk, professional and brain-working classes in Russia were just those who were given so thin a time. . . . What one knows before one goes to Russia is not worth knowing. In Russia one learns a new truth a minute. And the Duchess of Atholl—who has not been to Russia—gaily compiles, at second-hand, a book about Russia, called "The Conscripted Nation." . . .

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CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

THE return boat steamed slowly up the Thames, past Tilbury and Greenwich and Limehouse, and into the early-October afternoon mist that hung like a scarf over the Port of London.

It was like coming back into the Twilight of Europe. (In Russia one never feels that one is "in Europe," or "on the Continent." One is just in Russia.)

I had felt no immediate feeling of relief and joy at getting back on to the boat in St. Petersburg. Once or twice in the darkest moments of discomfort on the tour, in the early days before I had become acclimatised, I had pictured the embarkation, and the blisses that would attend it —the first deep hot bath on the boat being the first of them. But when it happened, it passed off without emotion. There was plenty still to see in Leningrad, and I would sooner have stayed.

The boat had been bleak enough on the five-day journey back. Its chief passengers, in an

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almost empty First Class, had been a small group of Germans, two men and a girl, who had been investigating Employment Insurance conditions in Russia, and were returning to Hamburg. I asked them how they had found the system there. They replied with the word " tadelloss "—that it was " faultless," " unimprovable." They said it was better than in Germany, where 19 per cent of wages had to be contributed, half by the worker, half by the factory. In Russia 14 per cent had to be contributed, all by the factory, and more service was given for it. They added that they had found the level of culture everywhere extremely—astonishingly—high. I give their opinion because they were business people—*bourgeois*—had started out with no romantic enthusiasm for Communism, and were talking on a subject that formed their own special line of knowledge.

They got off the boat at Kiel, under a clear night of stars. As we were waiting in the lock for the gang-plank to be run ashore, I asked the girl how she liked the idea of returning to her own country after six weeks in a new world. We were aware by this time that strange political upheavals had been taking place both in England and Germany in the time we had been away.

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She said, " How do I like going back ?—I wonder ! To our own town of Hamburg—where all the façades are so fine, and behind the façades there is such despair and destitution . . . ? After coming from a country where the façades are the only things that are dreadful—and behind them there's everything that is sound . . . ? "

That phrase of hers about what may or may not lie behind a beautiful exterior, crystallised many ideas already forming in me. Russia is still on the surface a slum. But it is as near shedding its slum-surface as a snake is to shedding its skin in the Spring. Do England and Germany with their imposing façades say the same of themselves ?—or believe it ?

As the boat steamed up the winding river, nearer and nearer into the mild murk of the Port of London, I began to think of my own personal reasons for not being in a hurry to return to " civilisation."

They began as personal ones, and went on to being more general.

There were first the faces. I was going to miss the faces that one sees in any street or theatre in Moscow—the types, the diversity, the play of intelligence and animation—and intellectual force ! It does not imply being " carried

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away by Communism" to repeat what must be common knowledge to any student of types and faces—that modern Russia has intellect at its service and to spare. Some young men "copy" Stalin, and some middle-aged men "copy" Lenin, in looks. But at least it is as good as copying M. Maurice Chevalier.

Then there was the talk, the incessant discussion of all subjects in heaven and earth. In England, out of vanity, I knew that I was going to miss being the centre of interest and attraction every time I started on a railway-journey. In an English railway-carriage no one is interested in what his neighbour has to say, unless it happens that he can give him a tip for to-morrow's horse-race. In Russia the visiting traveller has only to speak an English sentence for people to crowd in from neighbouring compartments for an hour, or hours, of eager and interested discussion.

There was the feeling, steaming up the River into that soft October dusk, that one was returning to a Tennysonian Lotos-land—"a land where it was always afternoon"—a Tennysonian Lotos-land, but with the supplies of Lotos steadily diminishing—where to consider any new problem with briskness and determination was to put oneself outside the bounds of respectability. . . .

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I came back from Russia with three ideas uppermost in my mind. The first of them was that our English Press had been telling lies about Russia profusely, scandalously and ceaselessly. The second was that the general condition of Russia was not nearly as bad as most of our newspapers pretend. The third was that we, as English people and therefore presumably with a patriotic regard for the welfare of our country in the next decade or so to come, would have seriously to consider if Russia could not teach us a lesson or two worth learning.

Brains at least as bright as mine have said this before. I will give my own reasons for the points that I have made.

The English Press has told lies (profusely, scandalously and ceaselessly) about the present state of Russia. I do not mean certain enlightened and intelligent organs of the Press, but the "popular" and most widely-read Press. I speak with authority on this, for I have worked for ten years, on and off, for this part of the Press. A few years ago I was refused permission to review a book of the opinions of Lenin—not because the opinions of Lenin were disgusting and revolting and would have alienated the sympathy of most readers of the paper—but because they were *not*

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disgusting and revolting, and could not have alienated the sympathy of any reader of the paper. . . . It was the paper's considered policy to proclaim that Lenin was a perverted and blood-thirsty maniac. His own expressed opinions on such matters as Marriage, the Family, and the Education of Children proclaimed him to be rather like a sound English Public-School master with conservative nineteenth-century tastes. Therefore it was "inopportune" to publish any such review of his ideas, at the same time as the paper was printing a daily Leading Article insisting that he was a perverted and blood-thirsty maniac. . . . Truth could find any refuge it liked save only in the columns of the news-paper. The "policy" of that paper could make even the truth subservient to it.

I was sent myself to Russia by a great London Daily paper. My expenses were paid in advance by the paper, and it was arranged that I was to write them some articles when I came back. I wrote the paper some articles. I kept my state-ments studiously moderate. I did not pretend to reveal "the whole political truth about Russia," but I noted that the trip was an interesting one, that the population was polite and seemed not too miserable, that many remarkable works were

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going forward, and that it was a country that the intellectually curious would do well to see for themselves. I tried to do no more than explode the theory, widely held in England, that all Bolsheviks eat a baby a day for their breakfast. . . . The paper kept my articles six weeks in suspense, and then returned them to me, saying that it was "inopportune" for them to appear before the public. After having paid me in advance and commissioned me to go to Russia, a great London paper with a daily circulation of a million could not bear to have an article in its columns that did not suggest that life in Russia was a Hell on Earth and a fulfilment of the dream of an anti-Christ. . . .

An official of the Conservative Central Office, a member of its "Subversive Movements Investigation Department," told me that a certain story about Russia had been brought to him the other day. It was so palpably without either proof or foundation that he said it was no good to him, and sent the teller away. But the story, he said, appeared unquestioned next morning in an important London paper. . . .

There is much that is less than satisfactory in Russia. Some of it is admitted by the Russians themselves. Some of it can be seen on the surface,

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whether admitted or not. But the extent of the stream of lies that had poured from most of the English Press in the last fourteen years is unbelievable—or believable only by someone who has worked for that Press and has also been to Russia. It does not constitute Satan's Masterpiece. Satan has little to do with it one way or the other. It is Stupidity's Masterpiece. And our own nation may have to suffer for it in the end.

If one has a business, one may have a rival in that same line of business. The rival may either be beating one's own firm and taking its trade away, or one's own firm may be beating his and taking his trade away—or yet again the two firms may be running level and finding that there is enough trade for both to make a profit. But in all cases, whether I am beating my rival, or my rival is beating me, or if we are running level, what I want to know is the truth about my rival. I do not want to know only as much as someone else thinks it is good for me to know. Similarly with Russia—our rival ? our successful enemy ?—or perhaps ultimately our good friend. In all cases England must be vividly concerned with knowing the true truth, " la vraie verité," about Russia. And that is what a large majority of

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thinking English people are being forbidden to hear. They are sitting and listening . . . to what a small handful of big business-men and newspaper-owners thinks it good for them to hear. They are accepting the indignity of being treated as little, irresponsible children. And in that course there is no hope and no sanity and no salvation.

It is this attitude, this subservience to the command "Thou Shalt Not Hear," persisted in through fourteen years, that now makes information about Russia almost impossible to give to thousands of normal English people.

It leads to the warnings that I quoted early in this book, seriously uttered by responsible people, to the tourist before he goes to Russia: "You will probably be either poisoned or shot. . . . You will find that no Russian has ever smiled since the Revolution. . . ."

It leads to the fact that, returning from Russia, the traveller is asked such questions as, "Do Russians get wages?" And when he answers that they do, he is met with the reply, "Oh, I understood that all they ever got was an inoperative bread-ticket. . . .!"

It leads to the result that were I to quote in any public place in England the following three

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random facts, I would either be accused of being a Communist fanatic, or, more crudely, of being in the pay of the Soviet Government. The three scattered facts are these. "So small a minority as the Communist Party (only one in two hundred of the entire population) could not govern so large a majority unless deep-felt needs were being satisfied." Fact Two:—"Lenin was a beloved and trusted leader whose death was mourned by countless millions." Third fact:—"In the last ten years of Soviet Government, the rate of infant mortality has been reduced by half."

Yet these highly pro-Bolshevist facts are taken from no pro-Bolshevist propaganda, nor from any person or persons whose business it is to be sympathetic to the new régime. They are taken from the august pages of the "Encyclopædia Britannica"—that publication which above all others accepts no facts until they are proved beyond reach of controversy.

We in England have a further trick of defeating our own arguments out of our own mouths. The two most popular cries against Russia at the moment are that Russia has become a nation of "slaves," marched to work by order and without a semblance of personal liberty; and at the same time, that the mechanisation of Russia is an

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impossible dream, because workmen persist in alternating between farm and factory—or one factory and another factory—and cannot be induced to master any one trade properly.

But does it occur to no one that these accusations are mutually contradictory? That one or other of them may be true, but not both?

There is more than a half-truth in the second. It is one of the major problems of Russia at the moment. Early in the régime, when village life was at a low ebb, there was an influx of peasants from the villages into the towns and factories. Later, the collective-farms were started. The collective farms have recently turned out a success, at least as far as offering good wages and good conditions. There is correspondingly a flowing-back of the town-workers on to the collective farms. Certain factories enjoy better conditions than others; everyone can be sure of getting work everywhere—and there is a corresponding flow of workers from one factory to another. It has been officially and piteously stated in official Soviet documents that as much as 40 per cent of the entire personnel of a factory have been known to change in a single half-year. Very bad! Very distressing for the authorities! An excellent argument for those who say that

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the industrialisation of Russia has great difficulties to contend with! But at the same time it is *not* a good argument for those who persist in believing that Russians are a nation of slaves! Could anything than this casual wandering from job to job be more opposed to slavery?

We in England have yet another trick. There is one case in which authentic information is cherished and venerated. It is when it is several years out of date. The third great cry against modern Russia is that it is persecuting (or has flatly abolished) Religion. A certain degree of persecution was undoubtedly in force several years ago. But nothing will shake the belief of the average Briton that it is not continuing.* I can mention a fact known to every foreign and native resident in Leningrad—that the Kazan Cathedral in the heart of the former capital is open for Christian Service. But I will not be believed in England. I can mention that I went myself to Sunday-morning Church in the Russian countryside—a service openly attended, with choral singing—and again be told that what I say is quite beside the mark. I can quote again the august "Encyclopædia Britannica" to the effect

* Sir Esmond Ovey's Ambassadorial despatch on the subject was not published by the Government. A truncated version appeared in the "Manchester Guardian."

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that "any twenty people in Russia can be recognised as a congregation (to worship in any Faith that they like) and are at liberty to hire a place of meeting" . . . and have it implied to me that the "Encyclopædia" must really be mistaken. . . .

We will not, as a nation, learn facts about Russia because we have been trained not to *want* to learn facts about Russia. But it is possible this apathy may lead to our undoing.

How can it affect us? How can this half-fulfilled dream of a cracked intellectual like Lenin have anything to say to us one way or another, that we should need to learn from it?

It can have something to say on two matters, both of them important ones. They are the questions of Production and Distribution. Dull—if you like, but vital. . . . In order to carry out the lessons, we need not necessarily "go Communist." England is not Russia. Their means of achievement need not be ours. Their Czarist history, black with despotism and persecution up to the moment of the final outbreak, has no relation to ours. The Monarchy could remain, and loyalty to the King need moult no feather. . . . But we must still learn.

The first lesson is the lesson of Production.

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One fact may be accepted as authentic, because it has been found to be authentic by every recent witness in the country: "The Industrial drive in Russia is now coming from BELOW—from the workers themselves." The output of work, the "shock-brigades" of workers, the competition between factory and factory, are now being organised by the workers among the workers. The authorities—the Government—have still to find them factories, machinery, plant and markets. It has to plan and it has to foresee. But the business of speeding-up and increasing output is now in the hands of the lower ranks themselves.

This is brought about by one means only. It is brought about because the workers know that they are working for themselves, and in industries that they own.

Because of this, it has become a matter of advantage and a matter of honour for as many people as possible to do the best work of which they are capable.

We in England will have—in one way or another—in a greater or less degree—to learn this lesson, and to imitate it. Workers will have to be given a greater share in the industry that they spend their lives on. I do not know the details of how this can be done. I am not a professional

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economist. But it will have to be done. And it will have to be done in a real way. No mere nebulous profit-sharing scheme, by which in a good year factory-hands get a bonus of a few pounds at Christmas *after* the Directors have drawn a five thousand pound salary, is likely to succeed. For people will not only work better, *but will work entirely differently*, when they feel that it is their own property that they are working on. Russia proves it.

Which country is getting further ahead industrially?—Russia, where it has been made profitable and honourable for textile workers, if they can, to tend thirty-two looms each—or England, where the workers resent being asked to increase from six looms to eight?

I suggest that if ever, in the near future, England has to buckle to, and work its best, perhaps for long hours, perhaps for low wages, in order to keep its head above water—it will only be achieved by giving the workers a larger and more genuine share in their work.

The second lesson is the lesson of Distribution.

There is a slogan to be heard these days:—"Production for Consumption, and not for Profit." It will have to be more thought about.

The most astonishing thing in England at the

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moment, and in all other countries save only Soviet Russia, is THAT THERE IS OVER-PRODUCTION IN ALMOST EVERY SINGLE CLASS OF GOODS. THERE IS OVER-PRODUCTION IN ALMOST EVERY SINGLE CLASS OF GOODS, WHILE STILL MILLIONS OF THE POPULATION HAVE NOT THE POWER TO BUY THE BAREST NECESSITIES. . . .

In England, factories and warehouses have too many boots, blankets, clothes, coals and everything else that man lives on. They cannot get rid of them. They cannot sell them. The stocks pile up, and nothing can make them move.

AND YET AT THE SAME TIME, there are several million people in England during any one winter who have not a reasonable, small, *un*-luxurious allowance of boots, blankets, clothes, coal and other things by which man lives.

Every wet day in London means that all the charwomen in London remain all day in wet feet. There is hardly a charwoman in London who has a second pair of shoes to take to work with her.

No writer of farces who ever lived could have *invented* a situation so fantastic! At the top there is so much surplus that the sellers cannot sell, and are poor or bankrupt. (In America

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there has been burning of surplus wheat. In the rubber plantations of the East there has been an official spraying of rubber-trees with a disease-germ—to curb Nature's untactful bounteousness, and to keep the price of rubber up.) No writer of farces could have invented a situation so fantastic—for at the other end of the scale there are people who want almost everything—and are able to buy almost nothing. . . .

Production for Consumption, which is the one means of bridging these widely-sundered extremes, has not yet even been attempted. Production for Profit (Profit meanwhile ceasing to exist) still remains everyone's hope and ambition.

I suggest that a State that Can Make Its Workers Work (as Russia is doing), and that can Distribute Its Production Reasonably To Them (as Russia is doing)—has at least two lessons of vital importance, worth attention and worth study by us.

The boat steams slowly up the River, and docks at London Bridge.

In stepping ashore one is stepping back from a land of wild "aliveness"—a land which may be heading right or may be heading wrong, but which at least is heading *somewhere*—to a land

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which is wrapt in apathy as the London River is wrapt in mist.

My personal experience of the apathy? A few articles, paid for in advance by a London paper, are sent back as being "inopportune" because they will not allow that the death-rattle is the only anthem to be heard in modern Russia. . . . (The paper is content to pay and not to print.) A one-act play with its scene laid in a Russian People's Court is returned by the only theatre in London capable of doing one-act plays:—"Wouldn't it be boosting the Bolshies, dear boy?" The play is little more than a literal transcription of a scene that did actually occur in a Moscow People's Court the other day. But the truth itself is held to be propagandist if it represents Russians as human beings. . . .

I return to a land—

Where the blindest bluffs hold good, dear lass,
And the wildest tales are true

—though what profit can come either from the bluff or the wild tale, our newspaper-proprietors alone know.

I return to a land where certain stupid directors of public information have more power than they deserve. And I return to it from a land

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that has about it something of the excitement of Romance. At the risk of bringing this small book to ruin through being thought a sentimentalist, I repeat that the bare, spare life of modern Russia—with all its thoughts and all its aims bent so drivingly upon the future—is life in a romantic land.

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INDEX

Admiralty (Leningrad), the, 34, 35, 37, 59, 63
Alexander III, 64
Alexander Palace, the, 65
"Anti-Religious Museum," 42
Atholl, Duchess of, 177

Ballet, Russian, 12
Baltic, the, 31
Banks, Russian State, 152–3
"Black Desk," the, 130
"Bremen," the, 30
British "Annual Register," 4
Brother, Lenin's, 64

Censor, the British, 5
Charques, R. D., 144
Chekhov, 12, 14, 57, 154
"Chinese Wall," the, 74
"Chorny Doska," the, 130
Churchill's Archangel campaign, Mr., 162
Club House, workmen's, 131–2
"Conscripted Nation, The," 177
Constantinople, 12
Corelli, Marie, 66
Customs-shed (Leningrad), 34
Czar, the, 3, 62, 65, 66, 88, 125

Detskoĕ-Selo, 65–70
Divorce in Russian law, 97–9
Don Cossack Choir, 118
"Dzerjinsky," the, 15 et seq., 56

Ekaterinburg, 65
Elbe, mouth of the, 30
"Encyclopædia Britannica," 187, 189–90
Engineering, English, 26–7
Europe Hotel, 168
Evans, Miss Edith, 172
Eydtkuhnen, 12

Factories, 43, 51–6, 127–31, 188–9
Farms, Collective, 10, 188
Figner, Vera, 64
Finland, Gulf of, 31
Fischer, Louis, 144–8
Ford, Henry, 138–9
Ford plant, Nijni-Novgorod, 111–14
Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, 34, 38, 63–5

Gaugin, 113
Glinka, 153

Digitized by Google

Gorky, Maxim, 70
Government Decree of 1900, 4
G.P.U., the, 119

Hamburg, 140, 180
"Hamlet," 154
Hindus, Maurice, 143 et seq.
Hotels, 48–51, 86, 106–7, 134

"Intourist," 10, 39 et seq., 73, 142
"Islands, The," 56
Ivan the Terrible, 13
Ivanovo Hotel, 139–41
Ivanovo-Vosnessensk, 11, 121, 132–41
"Izvestia," the, 152

Kamchatka, 122-3
Karsarvina, 76
Kazan Cathedral, 124, 189
Kiel, 179
Kiel Canal, the, 31
Kineshma, 11, 122–32
Kremlin, the, 74, 75, 85, 86 et seq., 100–1
Kronstadt, 34

Lenin, 13, 67–70, 100-5, 182–3, 187, 190
Leningrad, 10–1, 19, 34 et seq., 71 et seq., 169, 173, 178
Lenin's Tomb, 43, 85, 99–105
London, return to, 180 et seq.
London to Leningrad, 15 et seq.
Lydarsky, 153–4
Lyons, 144

"Manchester Guardian," 5, 46, 189
Marx, Karl, 140
Morosov Collection, the, 112
Moscow, 10–1, 68, 71 et seq., 142 et seq.

Neva, mouth of the, 32, 34
Nevsky Prospect, 35, 37, 61, 170
"New Statesman," the, 138
New York, Soviet office in, 29
Nijni-Novgorod, 11, 86, 100, 110–15
Nikolskaya Ulitza, the, 166
North Sea, the, 30

October Square, 48
Oka, the River, 114
"Our Youth," 155, 156
Ovey, Sir Esmond, 189

Paléologue, 3
Parliament Building, the, 63
"Passport to Life, The," 57
Paul I, 13, 66
Pavlinova, Madame, 72, 106 et seq.
"People's Court of Justice," the, 45, 85, 89–92, 164–6
Peter the Great, 13, 74, 125
"Petrouchka," 34
Police, Soviet, 61, 168–9
Press, the American, 27
Press, the English, 1 et seq., 82, 84, 140, 162, 182–5
Prices, Russian, 81 et seq.
Prinkipo, Trotsky exiled in, 12

Digitized by Google

Prisons, 63–5, 88–9
Pugachev, 13

Radio Station, Moscow, 88, 95–7
Railways, Russian, 71–72, 173–6
Rasputin, 125
Rastrelli, 74
Razin, 13, 118–9
"Red Poppy, The," 77, 156
Red Square, 85, 100
"Red Sunday," 5
Red Sunday (1905), 4, 37
Registry Office for Marriage, 97–9
Religion, Soviet attitude to, 124–7, 189–90
Revolution, the Russian, 13, 68
Riga, 12, 48
Russian Ballet, 12
"Russlan and Ludmilla," 153–4

St. Basil Cathedral, the, 74, 75
St. Isaac's Cathedral, 34, 42, 124
Sazonof, 3
Schleswig-Holstein, 31
Schlusselburg, the, 64
Smolny Institute, the, 62, 67–9
Stalin, 175
Stanislavsky, 155, 172
"Staro Vavarinskaia," the, 143

Taurida Palace, the, 62
"Theatre-Street," 76
Tipping, 31–2
"Tourist Shops," 85
Tretiakov Art Gallery, Moscow, 112
Trotsky, 12
Tsarskoë-Selo, *see* Detskoë-Selo

Underground Railway, London, 140

Vetrova, 64
"Village of Children, the," *see* Detskoë-Selo
Visitors, attitude to, 43 et seq., 55, 61, 79–80, 112–13, 135–7, 181
Volga, the, 2, 109, 114 et seq.

Warsaw company of Russian actors, the, 169
"White Guard, The," 169
Wicksteed, Alexander, 143
Winter Palace Square, 4, 37, 63
Winter Palace, the, 37, 63
Women in factories, 54
"Workers' Rest-House," 56
Working-class flats, 44, 92–5

Zarathustra, 104
Znaiminskia Hotel, 37

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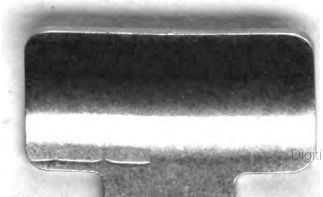

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